

**Speech by the General Director of the Section of Human Rights and Minorities  
of the Slovak Republic Government Office Dr. Marek Lisánsky  
at the meeting of the HRC Forum for Minorities  
“The Roma National Minority and the Right to Education”  
(Geneva, 15–16 December 2008)**

Madam president,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to inform you about the new policies and measures that have been adopted recently in Slovakia and also of initiatives that have been tested successfully and are being implemented on the right to education of Roma minority.

The Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic is implementing the National Plan for the Implementation of Human Rights Education 2005–2014, which is based on the United Nations World Programme for Human Rights Education.

Slovakia is also participating in the programme Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 and in the years 2009–2010 will hold the Decade Presidency. Under the National Action Plan for the Decade the Ministry of Education is for example cooperating with the Roma Education Fund on a special project focussed on supporting introductory education for five and six year old children in pre-school facilities in selected areas.

In the area of policy, the government adopted a medium term policy document on the development of the Roma national minority SOLIDARITY–INTEGRITY–INCLUSION 2008–2013 defining the current challenges in the areas of education, health, employment and housing and proposing relevant measures.

In the area of education and training of Roma children and pupils, in April 2008 the government approved a Strategy on education and training for Roma children and pupils including the development of secondary and higher education, which formulated various recommendations for the 2008–2015 period.

Since 2002 the concept of a zero year has been used in elementary schools in Slovakia. This is intended for children who have reached the physical age of six years as at 1 September but who are not yet mature enough for school, who come from a

socially disadvantaged background and do not possess the social and language skills necessary to complete the first year of elementary school in a single school year.

Another successful initiative of the Ministry of Education is the establishment of the profession of teacher assistant, whose number and financing continues to increase each year. For comparison, in school year 2002/2003 there were 200 teacher assistants and in school year 2007/2008 there were around 1 000 teacher assistants.

At the end, I would like to inform you, that an event of historic importance for the Roma language took place in Bratislava on 29 June 2008 – the ceremonial proclamation of the standardisation of the Roma language in Slovakia. Official standardisation puts the Roma language on an equal footing with the languages of the other national minorities living in Slovakia.

Thank you for your attention.