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Statement of the European Roma Rights Centre

On the occasion of the United Nations Minority Forum:
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Good morning,

Roma remain to date the most deprived ethnic minority of Europe. Almost everywhere their fundamental rights are threatened. Disturbing cases of racist violence targeting Roma have occurred in recent time. Discrimination against Roma in employment, education, health care, housing, administrative and other services is common in many countries where Roma live.

- When it comes to the political participation of the Roma in almost all the countries in Europe still falls short of what their total population size would suggest and warrant. This is especially noticeable in the composition of national parliaments in European countries with large Romani communities such as Romania, Hungary, Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Serbia.

In general, Romani parties based solely on ethnic affiliation in all of the countries in Europe have done very poorly in elections, with some exceptions at the municipality level. In addition, Roma are rarely represented among the candidates of the mainstream parties and even then they are they overwhelmingly consider for lower level positions. Thus, there have been only a few cases of Roma being elected as representatives of the mainstream political parties.

Moreover the political participation of Roma at the European level is also of concern. The last election to the European Parliament confirmed this, as it resulted in only one Romani representative being elected, which is disproportionately low considering the number of Roma within the European Union.

Another problematic issue is the low participation of Roma EU citizens residing in an EU country other than that of which they are a national. Although every EU citizen has the right to vote and to stand for election to the European and municipal election in their country of residence, many Roma who have exercised their right to freedom of movement within the EU face significant obstacles to registering their residence in another EU Member State and are thus effectively excluded from this form of participation.

For these reasons, the European Roma Rights Centre strongly recommends the following:

- Governments must encourage effective political participation of Roma in the national parliament, through the guarantee of a number of places representative of the size of the Roma minority.

European institutions and national governments should promote an awareness of political rights and encourage greater political participation among Roma, including through the exercise of voting rights for EU citizens residing in other Member States.

Mainstream political parties on the domestic and European level should be encouraged to provide greater opportunities to Romani candidates, to enhance the effective political participation of Roma, and to include Roma issues in their platform

Thank you very much for your attention.

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) is an international public interest law organisation engaging in a range of activities aimed at combating anti-Romani racism and human rights abuse of Roma, in particular strategic litigation, international advocacy, research and policy development, and training of Romani activists. For more information about the European Roma Rights Centre, visit the ERRC website at <http://www.errc.org>.

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