

Thank you Madam President, although the declaration was adopted 20 years ago its provisions are still not fully implemented. Moreover persons belonging to minorities are still often at risk of being discriminated against. There is still often neither respected nor protected.

With a population of some 12 million, Roma are the largest ethnic minority group in Europe. Roma in Europe and Ukraine face greater hardship than the rest of the population. Under the agenda item our task is to identify existing challenges and counter it in the practical implementation of the declaration, and in my opinion challenge number one is the awareness of Roma population about the declaration and their rights. What would the declaration mean to a Roma living in rural area in Ukraine? What do they know about the declaration? Unfortunately not much, unless they know about their rights and demand the government to make sure their rights are protected.

Although, it is the states responsibility to promote and ensure compliance with the declaration of the rights of persons belonging to minorities I believe that the civil society and the NGOs are well as representatives of minorities have a vital role in promoting the declaration and the rights of persons belonging to minorities. But first I believe they have to be trained how to do such work and to be successful partners with the decision making bodies and to be able to express their needs and take the necessary steps towards the full realisation of their rights.

Challenge number two in my opinion is access to education. Roma face a number of barriers in accessing education as reflected in high illiteracy rates, in many cases Romani children do not have access to quality education and that is because of many reasons and some of them are not having pre-school education, not having birth certificate, but in some cases Romani children are placed into schools with children with mental disabilities, just because they are Roma or for some families it is easier to place their children in such schools because they are free of charge, they are providing hot meals or clothes. Language barriers and lack of positive models are still prevalent among large sector of the Romani community and result in further barriers for Romani boys and girls to access education.

Challenge number three, many Roma communities in Ukraine live in conditions of extreme poverty with little access to basic social and medical services. As a result the health status of large number of Roma is worse than a comparable segment of the non-Roma community. In the EU countries an average of 20% of Roma are not covered by medical insurance or do not know if they are covered.

And challenge number four, print and electronic media contribute to and reinforce anti-Romani rights stereotypes, associating Roma with crimes, drugs and general unspecified danger. I want to give you one example, in different regions of Ukraine the police giving order to newspapers to print instructions, how to behave when you see Roma people in the streets and for example, they say when you see Roma, you should not look into their eyes, you should not stop and talk to them, just do not give anything if they ask you something, do not open the doors when the Roma are knocking into your doors and we tried to talk to the police officers who gave this instructions and they say that we are doing the profilactic work, so they believe it is right to warn the Ukrainian population about Roma and how to behave when you see Roma in the streets.

Most certainly minorities of every kind should be encouraged to change their unique individual group identities, only if there is no discrimination in access to basic human rights and active participation the minorities can assume their rightful place in society. Members of minorities should be given the opportunity to study their own language and culture and to acquire the practical social skills necessary to them to succeed both in their local communities and within the majority society. Before concluding let me also emphasise the importance of the forum on minority issues in the promotion and protection of the

rights persons belonging minorities and we hope we will be in close cooperation with independent expert, Rita Izsak and we will be looking for your visit to Ukraine if you could. Thank you.