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PROPOSAL FOR ESTABLISHING ROMA OMBUDSPERSON – CONTACT POINT

Anti-Gypsyism is almost a global phenomenon, as virulent as it is commonplace. Grounded in racial superiority and social segregation, reminiscent of colonial-era attitudes, this form of life-destroying *apartheid* has its roots in an historic stigmatization of Romani people crudely expressed in the misnomers *cigany*, *zigeuner*, *gitans* and many more.

Nearly 50 years ago in London the 1st World Romani Congress resolved to ban these words from contemporary usage. While the more respectful media and public have adopted Rom, Roma, unacceptable verbal abuse is again cropping up in the hate speech we hear today even from the mouths of mainstream politicians. Much to blame for enflaming popular hostility are the irresponsible, sometimes vicious statements of extreme and yes leading politicians. A Bulgarian deputy prime minister has called Roma *feral*, *subhuman creatures*; a Czech president referred to *gypsies* as work-shy *inadaptable*. After another arson attack in Italy, the Minister of Interior was quoted as saying: "That is what happens when *gypsies* steal babies." The current Minister of the Interior said in a recent interview: "Illegal foreign migrants will be deported but Italian Roma unfortunately we must keep them here."

Lack of representation is a major handicap. The once-vocal European Roma and Traveler Forum have all but folded due to withdrawal of funding. A bare half dozen Roma have been elected to the European Parliament. Few serve in state parliaments. The number in the Bulgarian Parliament has recently shrunk. However, since the holding by the IRU of the 10th World Congress in 2016, a political revival has been apparent. The adoption of the Democratic Transition, making possible global-wide electronic elections, presages a vital reformation of the Romani national movement.

A nation now proud to have a foothold in the United Nations, in coming to you in New York, we seek an opportunity to outline our situation and explore with you the short- and long-term possibilities of our role here at the UN and with ECOSOC.

What action is required?

The International Romani Union requires larger participation of the European Union, Council of Europe, United Nations and their institutions to take part in the solving process of hate crime, antigypsyism and other forms of discrimination towards Roma in Europe. The International Romani Union intends to solve this problem by **establishing new office in Strasburg, France which will serve as an informal Roma Ombudsperson – contact point with national human rights institutions**, following the latest development of the international and national policies and acts of discrimination against Roma in each country in Europe.

The **overall aim** is to increase the protection of Roma rights throughout Europe while increasing the awareness among human rights institutions and Roma community.

The **specific objective** of the project is to increase the advocacy and monitoring capacities of Roma through International Romani Union strengthening the cooperation with the national human rights institutions in order to prevent violation and discrimination of Roma.

Therefore, the project proposal consist 3 major components:

Component 1: Preparatory and Advocacy action

1.1. Establishing new office in France which will initiate communication with the regional and international organizations in order to define the structure, mandate and the scope of the Roma Ombudsperson and communication channels with the national human rights institutions.