

International Charitable Organization

“Roma women fund “Chirikli”

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Thank you madam Chair, distinguished colleagues!

As we say in Romanes, Teyaven Bakhtala, I wish all wellness.

Let me first begin, by introducing myself. My name is Olena Vaidalovych. In the Romani language my last name, “Vaida” means leader, so I am here today carrying on my shoulders, the leadership of my people.

As a twenty-three years old young Roma woman from Ukraine, I want to raise the plight of Roma people whose issues and daily struggles remain unheard.

On June 23<sup>rd</sup> of this year, a young Roma man, my age was killed. This was after many acts of violence were carried on Roma settlements.

Why do I speak about these attacks?

First, because discrimination is both a cause and a consequence of stateless Roma in Ukraine who face direct and multiple discrimination not only in the documentation procedure but also in accessing fundamental rights and freedoms such as education. Roma women, are particularly vulnerable to this, as they face triple discrimination:

As woman.

As Roma woman

And as stateless Roma woman

Roma considered to be the largest undocumented group in Ukraine.

And the second reason why Roma risk being stateless in Ukraine is due to a lack of documentation.

The estimation of the statelessness level can be based on the statistics. Unfortunately, the state does not know the exact number of the Roma population. Consequently, the scale of statelessness is impossible to determine accurately. But according to unofficial estimates of Coalition of Roma NGOs, about 60,000 thousand Roma live at the risk of statelessness in Ukraine.

And here we need to clarify. In most cases, Roma living permanently in the territory of Ukraine are entitled to Ukrainian citizenship according to the law, but do not have documents determining their nationality. This is the reason I personally believe that in Ukraine some of the Roma communities are at a high risk of statelessness and therefore deprived of access to administrative and medical services.

For instance, Roma women face the following obstacles in acquiring identity documents:

- The absence of state registration of civil records documents prevents them from enjoying social and economic rights.
- The absence of birth certificate in practice deprives children of the right to education and ultimately makes it impossible to obtain higher education and employment. Women without documents cannot receive birth

certificates for their children and, consequently, leads transgenerational statelessness.

**As I end my statement, I want to share the leadership I carry on my shoulders with those of you who have power to change by:**

1. Collecting comprehensive gender disaggregated official data on the number of Roma in Ukraine, as well as on their socio-economic situation.
2. Providing civil registration documents and birth certificates to all Roma without documents.
3. By allocating sufficient budget in order to simplify the procedure of obtaining ID cards and ensure that this is done in consultation with Roma civil society.
4. Ensuring that all instances of violence, murder and hate attacks against Roma, are effectively investigated and that justice be rendered.
5. Last but certainly not least, we must remember that nothing about Roma can or should be done without Roma. It is therefore essential that Roma are fully included in policy making.

Nothing about us without us.

As a Roma woman said last year in this forum, we should not give a voice to the voiceless but rather pass them the microphone. I am hopeful that my voice today is being heard.

Thank you, madam Chair!