

Thank you Mr. Chairperson

I am Serkan Baysak representing the NGO Romani Godi in Turkey that works to defend Roma Rights. The Roma in Turkey are an ethnic minority with a population of around 5 million and are subject to many forms of marginalization, including hate speech, hate crimes and many forms of intersectional discrimination. Today however, I would like to draw attention to the issue of environmental injustice.

In 2022 we conducted 17 field visits to different regions in Turkey, interviewing more than 20 NGOs and 200 individuals from the Roma community. We saw that almost all the Roma settlements are affected by a lack of environmental protection. Many Roma settlements are next to industrial zones and dirty streams which factories use to discharge toxic waste. Children do not have spaces for games and socialization and are forced into polluted areas. Those Roma settlements do not benefit from urban services as other settlements and are not accessible for disabled people.

The Çorlu Hıdırağa settlement, next to the Çorlu stream, which is the most polluted in Turkey. We can evidence serious health issues for Roma as a result, including, lung cancer and kidney problems. Two of our colleagues lost their fathers because of lung cancer.

In Karasu districts of Sakarya more than 100 Roma families live in tents near the shipyard. They do not have regular electricity and water. Children get ill due to lack of clean water. There is increased risk of traffic accident because the main road is passing in the middle of Roma settlement. The environmental vulnerability of Roma settlements is the result of both historical and ongoing discrimination. The lack of proper housing, children cannot continue school and cannot take part in qualified labor market.

The intersection of Environmental injustice and discrimination leads to systematic violations of the rights for the Roma minority.

The proposed Roma Action Plan for 2022-2030 is an important step for the integration of Roma in Turkey. We would like to call on the government of Turkey to ensure the inclusion of environmental justice and urgent measures to address its harm. Most importantly they should ensure the full inclusion of Roma in developing the plan.

We also urge UN bodies to ensure inclusion of Roma throughout their programs in Turkey and use their extensive competency to address the increasing human rights violations caused by environmental injustice.