

Key not speech by Mrs. Soraya Post
President of the International Romani Women's Network
(IRWN)

Romani Women's Rights Conference
Amare glasura ashunde
Stockholm 3-4 December 2007

Dear Minister,
Dear Council of Europe Deputy Secretary General,
Dear Director of Fundamental Rights Agency,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like on behalf of all members of International Romani Women's Network to express my gratitude to the Swedish government who took the political stand to host this important conference along with the Agency for Fundamental Rights and Council of Europe. Without the commitment of all of you our voice would not be heard. I must also highlight that the sincere commitments from these EU_institutions encourage us Roma women activists.

IRWN was created four years ago and during these years it brought together Romani women activists from twenty countries, raised awareness on Romani Human Rights and campaigned against their violations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are here today to discuss issues which few years ago, were considered as "taboo": violations of reproductive rights (forced sterilization), harmful practices as early marriages, trafficking in human being with victims our children and young girls.

The Romani Women Networks have a very strong position against all these violations of Human Rights. It is unacceptable for a Europe of democratic achievements to forcibly sterilize its women citizens; it is unthinkable that this crime remains unpunished. We claim from the countries where such practices took place to publicly recognize and compensate the victims.

Almost every day Roma in Europe come across anti-Gypsyism behaviour: discrimination, harassment and humiliation of our people are frequent and political commitment to tackle this phenomenon is tentative.

We, Romani women often hear that the problems Romani women face, are related to our culture and our way of life. It is not true: the problems come from the persistent discrimination in our societies. We will preserve our culture because this is our richness. We believe that our culture is a European one and has to be respected.

We will claim respect, we will battle to obtain one day equality of treatment and social justice, we will make aware our communities of their rights and I am confident that we will succeed.

During last four years Romani women activists representing old and young generations came across obstacles even within their communities, but now nobody dares to say that Romani women are confined only to their traditional roles.

We became valid negotiators and mediators at local, national and international level. Our empowerment was beneficial not only for us but also for our communities.

We, Romani Women in Europe and in other parts of the world, call for full and comprehensive equality in the societies we live. We call for abolition of existing laws, policies, regulations, and customs that directly or indirectly discriminate our people. Politicians should stop see us as a problem, and if they think about our history they will understand that the problems does not come from us. We all are facing a society problem.

Finally, I would like to formulate a request on behalf of Romani Women: a yearly gathering like this one today is necessary in order to take stock of the situation and identify future fields of action. We need your support to promote this idea within your governments and I am sure International organizations will stand by us.

We hope today that other governments will take a political stand and listen to our voice next year.

And please take the opportunity for creating contacts between Roman women activists and state representatives from your country.

I would like to thank the International institutions for being with us all these years. Please continue to do so; it is a vital matter for Roma people.

And, finally, thank you Swedish government for listening to our voice.

I am today a proud Swedish Romani woman.

Thank you.