

Spotlighting the widespread discrimination against Roma and victims of caste systems

During the 17th Session of the Human Rights Council, Mr. Githu Muigai, the UN Special Rapporteur on Racism, presented his annual report focusing on the issue of discrimination against Roma in Europe and “discrimination based on work and descent,” which affects about 260 million people worldwide. Taking the statements made in the Durban Declaration (2001) and the Outcomes Document of Durban Review Conference (2009) into consideration, he took a victim-oriented approach, presenting an analysis of the racism and racial discrimination against these communities.

Under Item 9 as Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur, Daisuke Shirane from the IMADR Geneva Office made the following oral statement on behalf of IMADR:

IMADR welcomes the report of the Special Rapporteur and his thorough analysis and recommendations.

Concerning the situation of Roma, we also welcome the efforts made at a regional level in Europe. However, as the Special Rapporteur indicates, there is still persisting and wide spread discrimination against Roma in different countries where Roma communities and individuals are facing various issues on the ground. While regional initiatives can play a role in creating solutions, each State has its own responsibility to take concrete actions and create tangible outcomes in the society in order to eliminate discrimination against Roma and protect their human rights. Effective involvement of affected communities must be ensured, too.

Furthermore, one of the emergent issues to be addressed is racial violence, hate speech and hate crimes against Roma and incitement thereto. Unfortunately, we are observing negative trends in Europe. There are more and more right-wing extremist and nationalist groups targeting Roma. The situation is more alarming in some countries, where even public officials and politicians are using anti-Roma rhetoric and making racial statements. The issue is quite serious and urgent, and we would like to ask the Special Rapporteur to suggest how State and non-State actors, including the affected community, should deal with this.

In Hungary, for example, there have been several incidents of racist attacks and killings of Roma since 2008; people including children have been harassed and murdered, and property destroyed. The tension between Roma and non-Roma populations in Gyöngyöspata is still high. While noting measures taken by the State, a more comprehensive, active and firm approach is necessary to stop the escalation of the situation, address root causes, prevent and eliminate racial violence and create a peaceful co-existence in the society. In this context, we welcome the recent visit of the Special Rapporteur to the country and look forward to his report. We would also appreciate any suggestions he can make now.

Regarding discrimination based on work and descent, we highly appreciate the continuing efforts of the Special Rapporteur to address this issue and would like to

express our sincere support. Finally, we also urge the government of Sri Lanka to accept the request of the Special Rapporteur to visit the country in order for him to study the racial dimension of the conflict and to facilitate the reconciliation and sustainable peace building.