

children in the school program, no implication in unlawful acts, no possession of land or a house in Thessaloniki or anywhere else in Greece. Priority will be given to those who have been living in Evosmos and then moved to the Gallikos River. After that come those who have been living in Evosmos for years and were forced to move to other places after the 1998 eviction. Finally are those who came to the Gallikos River in the last year. The land will be divided up with distinct signs, so that everybody knows where the borders of each plot of land end.

**d.) *Menemeni* (29/9/1999)**

GHM's Christina Rougneri together with Thanassis Triarides from DROM Network for Roma Social Rights and Emi Xistros from Doctors of the World visited the Roma camp in Menemeni. The population of this camp has increased dramatically in 1999 and the shelters have almost reached the main street that leads to the camp. According to Mr. Asimakis, the Rom in charge of the settlement, nothing has really changed for the better. Each family has a water tap, but there are neither toilets, nor a sewage system. The camp gets its electricity illegally from a nearby provider. The Roma keep stealing electricity with the silent consent of the authorities. Initial information about Menemeni from DROM and Doctors of the World was related less to the deterioration of the living conditions and more to the issue of drug trafficking. The two non-governmental organizations attributed great importance to the drug market set up in the camp, arguing that easy money has really distanced the Roma from them. Any sincere effort made by the NGO volunteers -e.g. holding of group classes for all ages organized by DROM and regular visits of Doctors of the World for examining people and vaccinating children- was not really welcome. The mobile clinic was robbed and destroyed twice. There was neither interest, nor willingness for continuing the training seminars and teaching programs, which started three years ago. Mr. Asimakis did not really challenge this impression, showing a mixture of indifference and politeness when asked about the possibility of re-establishing the clinic. He only urged the newcomers to leave the place at once and the state to build houses for his people in the very same area. Drug trafficking was taking place even during our visit, which was deliberately held in the evening. Two cars approached the camp while the NGO team was leaving and another one was just parking outside a house. Based on information from DROM and Doctors of the World drug trafficking takes place with the help of some local policemen. During a discussion preceding the visit, the Gallikos River Roma made reference to Menemeni as a bad example, an example that the residents of the self-managed camp in Gonou should always remember and avoid.

GHM's Christina Rougheri together with Thanassis Triarides from DROM Network for Roma Social Rights and Emi Xistros from Doctors of the World visited the Roma camp in the drained bed of the Gallikos River. While the visit was taking place, a team of Doctors of the World was completing the examination of the sick residents of the camp. After a tour around the settlement (which exists without the slightest infrastructure), the visit ended with a vivid discussion in the house of the President of the Roma Association of Agia Sophia (which is also the chosen name of the Roma union that will eventually be in charge of managing the camp). The President, Mr. Frangoulis, and the secretary, Mr. Sabanis, expressed their discontent with the inclusion of three Roma families in the tentative list of potential residents in the settlement of Gonou. The argument was that these three families, together with their relatives, will create problems to the whole settlement as they belong to a tribe, which practices petty robbery as a profession. The visitors tried to convey to their interlocutors that no one can be excluded on the basis of their belonging to a certain tribe or on the basis of allegations and hypothetical scenarios. Once again the visitors ran through the prerequisites for the future residents and explained the procedure to be followed for the distribution of land and for remaining in the settlement (see below). The Roma expressed their willingness to make their settlement a real example to be followed by those already existing and those meant to be created in the future.

It was also pointed out that even though many Roma children attend school, Roma parents seem to be very skeptical about sending their daughters to school after the age of 12. The following discussions made it clear that the Roma put the honor of the family and, in particular, the honor of the girl -her virginity- on top of everything. In their majority they expressed fears deriving from the risks that their girls may face while attending school after twelve - kidnapping, sex before marriage and coupling with undesirable boys. The DROM representative reassured them that classes for all women aged from 12 to 40 will take place, within the settlement, so as not to deprive young women of the possibility to study. Moreover, an effort was made to demonstrate to the parents that the responsibility for the behavior of a child is, to a large extent, in the hands of the family itself.

**c.) *Former military barracks of Gonou* (29/9/1999)**

The works in the former military barrack of Gonou have almost reached their final phase. Based on the estimations of both the authorities and DROM, the transfer of the Roma from the Gallikos River to their new camp will be over by the end of October 1999. The settlement has already been provided with a sewage system, water and electricity supply. The second to last phase includes the construction of a clinic and a cultural center, as well as the paving of the streets. The final phase would be the distribution of land to the families. Some problems have already emerged as Roma from other parts of Greece, who already have houses, requested to be included in the list. Moreover, Roma tent-dwellers living in the Gallikos River now (originally from Evosmos) do not wish to accept three Roma families, which belong to a different tribe and see petty robberies as a profession and not as an unlawful act. The distribution will be based on a list prepared by the Roma themselves and the final decision will be left to the Prefectural authorities of Thessaloniki and the committee of NGOs and Roma representatives. The prerequisites for getting a plot of land in the self-managed camp are numerous: commitment to respect the cleanliness of the place, attendance of all

Mr. Chairman, we welcome that such shortcomings of local administration in Greece are brought to our attention. I wonder, however, whether they are really worthy of being discussed in a forum like this, considering in particular that the persons involved cannot be said to be suffering let alone being endangered in any way. Those are cases of people going through a routine administrative process and encountering difficulties in it. I think that if all the states represented here were subjected to the same scrutiny as the one applied to Greece, it would not be surprising to find in every single state 100 instances of persons whose right to the citizenship of the country where they reside is not established,

Mr. Chairman, I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the expression of condolences for the tragic loss of the Alternate Foreign Minister, Yiannos Kranidiotis, who was one of the foremost promoters in Greece of respect for human rights and a strong supporter of NGOs. I should add that he was instrumental in the abolition of Article 19.

**10.) In memory of the Greek Alternate Foreign Minister, G. Kranidiotes, GHM and MRG-Greece donate 100,000 to the Roma Associations of Chalandri and Nea Alikarnassos.**

In memory of the Alternate Foreign Minister, Giannos Kranidiotes, GHM and MRG-G donated 50,000 drachmas to the Association "Elpida" of the tent-dwelling Roma of Nea Alikarnassos, Crete and 50,000 drachmas to the Association "Elpida" of the tent-dwelling Roma of Chalandri, Attica. Both of them aim at the improvement of the inadmissible living conditions of the tent-dwelling Roma of Greece and for the respect of their fundamental rights.

**11.) GHM mission to Thessaloniki**

**a.) *Visit to the Vice-Prefect of Thessaloniki* (29/9/1999)**

GHM's Christina Rougneri together with Thanassis Triarides from DROM Network for Roma Social Rights and Emi Xistros from Doctors of the World visited the Vice-Prefect of Thessaloniki, Mr. Abraham Kaltaverides. The visit took place within the framework of the Special Office of the Prefecture for the Monitoring of Roma Issues. At the meeting there was also a representative of the NGO network, involved in carrying into practice the idea of the Gonou self-managed camp and, Ms. Nitsa Mazarakis, an employee at the Prefecture and founder of DROM. The discussion was about the latest developments in Gonou, the progress of the works, the need for a bus to transfer the NGO volunteers who will work in the educational programs. Textbooks in both Greek and Romanes were also presented. The issue of land distribution was also mentioned though Mr. Kaltaverides suggested to hold on this discussion until the final list of candidate beneficiaries is completed.

**b.) *Gallikos River* (29/9/1999)**

status of stateless of these people, but also grant them citizenship, in the framework of Article 32 of the UN Convention.

**Greek Helsinki Monitor and Minority Rights Group – Greece** express their profound sorrow over the tragic death, on 14/9/1999, of Alternate Foreign Minister **Yannos Kranidiotis**, who contributed methodically to the consolidation and respect of human rights in Greece and the strengthening of the role of NGOs. Moreover, in anticipation of the presentation of this report to the OSCE Review Conference 1999, they submitted a complimentary copy to the Greek Foreign Ministry on 16/9/1999.



PERMANENT MISSION  
OF GREECE TO THE OSCE

**STATEMENT MADE BY  
THE GREEK DELEGATION  
IN EXERCISE OF ITS RIGHT OF REPLY  
Vienna, 21 September 1999**

This is the response to the statement made by the NGOs Greek Helsinki Monitor and Minority Rights Group-Greece, which have also circulated a written report on the subject of their statement, titled Greece's Stateless Persons.

The statement and the report center on Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Code, on the basis of which a number of people have lost their Greek citizenship. But, as is made clear in both the statement and the report, Article 19 has now, for more than a year, been abolished. It is a thing of the past, it belongs in the past. And it is appropriate that the grammatical tense used in the report is the past tense.

The question is posed what to do with the people who have lost their citizenship. The position of the Greek Government on this is clear: those wishing to acquire Greek citizenship may apply for it, following the legal procedure provided for by Greek law. In fact, a lot of former Article-19 cases have applied for Greek citizenship and some have already been granted it.

Mention is also made of the question of citizenship of the Roma population in Greece. Here, too, the report makes it clear that the Roma in Greece have Greek citizenship.

The speaker referred to some people, numbering in his own words fewer than 100, whose right to Greek citizenship has not been established. And he mentioned one instance, expanded at some length in the report, of one person, Mr. Sezgin, who has been trying to obtain Greek citizenship and whose efforts have not yet been successful.

prerequisite of Article 19. In August 1998, then Foreign Minister Theodore Pangalos stated that within a year most or all of the stateless living in Greece would be offered Greek citizenship; this promise was repeated in subsequent months by then Alternate and Deputy Foreign Ministers George Papandreou and Yannis Kranidiotis. However, to date the government has taken no steps to carry out this promise. The Greek government must grant citizenship immediately to these few hundred residents and consider additional means to redress the injustice. The former is a legal obligation under Article 32 of the 1954 U.N. Convention which Greece has been disregarding.

It should also introduce the possibility to grant citizenship to the few thousand former Greek citizens who are now living as stateless abroad. It should finally grant the former Greek citizens who have been stripped of their citizenship under Articles 19 or 20 of the Citizenship Code and live abroad with different citizenship (almost all are ethnic Turks or Macedonians) at least unhindered entrance to Greece, irrespective of their minority advocacy abroad; and examine favorably any possible (but expected to be rare) request for citizenship.

### **Born Stateless**

Another category of Muslims are people who were born stateless. Their Roma ancestors immigrated from Bulgaria. Christian Roma and most Muslim Roma whose ancestors were born in Greece were granted citizenship in the 1970s (most Roma had been stateless until then). However, the non-Greek ancestry Roma (self-identified as Turks) were forced by the police to acquire expensive alien residence permits valid only for one year. On these residence permits it is mentioned that the bearer is of “undefined” citizenship and of Turkish nationality (i.e. ethnicity). In 1999 the police department of Komotini refused to give an identity document to one such person, Mr. Durgut Sezgin, thus clearly violating Greece’s obligations under the relevant UN Convention. Mr. Sezgin asked for such documents after our NGOs had pointed out to him the possibility of obtaining them. He has been threatened by the local police not to insist on acquiring such documents. What is more, eight months after his application and only after the Ombudsman stepped in, the police alleged that the reference to an undefined citizenship was a mistake that had supposedly been repeated for years. They claimed that Mr. Sezgin had Bulgarian citizenship, and asked him to prove that he is not Bulgarian in order to consider him a stateless person. The authorities have no document showing that Mr. Sezgin, who was born in Greece and never left it, has a Bulgarian citizenship. They base their argument on birth certificates (in Greek) that his parents had to sign, just like the majority of the illiterate Turkish-speaking Muslims, lest they run into trouble with local powerful authorities.

Many Roma in Komotini and other places in Greece have been assimilated into the Turkish minority and are consistently being refused citizenship rights. What more, they are not given even the status of stateless persons according to the UN Convention. Mr. Sezgin is one of them. The attitude of the police towards him is typical for most of the cases. Taking advantage of the highly bureaucratic procedures, or simply denying a reasonable excuse, the lower administration blatantly violates the law and refuses to provide people like Mr. Sezgin with the necessary documents. Thus these people are officially considered non-existent and have no access to rights and benefits that are given to all other citizens. Once again, Greece is obligated not only to acknowledge the

For the second case, charges against the policemen will be pressed by the victims and by the GHM.

**9.) Stateless Roma in Greece, victims of article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Code.**

*The case of Durgut Sezgin.*

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**REPORT ON GREECE TO THE OSCE REVIEW CONFERENCE 1999**

21 September 1999

**Greece's Stateless Persons**

**“Article 19” Stateless**

Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Code (Law 3370 of 1955) was an obvious case of discrimination. It provided that: “A person of non-Greek ethnic origin leaving Greece without the intention of returning may be declared as having lost Greek citizenship. This also applies to a person of non-Greek ethnic origin born and domiciled abroad. His minor children living abroad may be declared as having lost Greek citizenship if both their parents or the surviving parent have lost it as well. The Minister of the Interior decides on these matters with the concurring opinion of the Citizenship Council.” Article 19 was abolished by a parliamentary voice vote on 11 June 1998. When announcing the government’s decision to abolish Article 19, on 23/1/1998, Minister of the Interior Alekos Papadopoulos stated that, since its introduction in 1955, 60,000 Greek citizens had lost their citizenship in application of that article; the large majority were members of the minority in Thrace.

The abolition had no retroactive effect: past “victims” of that article cannot claim back their citizenship. The latter are those who have remained stateless within Greece (estimates vary between 300-1,000) or abroad (some 1,400 in Turkey and an unknown number elsewhere) and those who adopted the nationality of another country after they moved there and lost Greek citizenship (the vast majority). Stateless individuals in Greece have had difficulty receiving social services like health care and education and—until December 1997—were even denied the protection of the 1954 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, which Greece ratified in 1975.

As a result of pressure from NGOs and minority deputies and organizations, around one hundred ethnic Turks made stateless under Article 19 have received identity documents from Greek authorities in accordance with the 1954 U.N. Convention. It is important to mention here that these stateless residents of Greece had unjustly been stripped of their citizenship in first place, as they had never settled abroad, a

On September 12, 1999 the Roma who live without any infrastructure in Kalogreza (an area close to the Olympic Stadium of Athens) celebrated the baptism of a child. Around 2 a.m. the police came into the camp and asked the Roma to turn the music down, because it was very late and the neighbors were complaining. The music went on so the police came back again half an hour later, this time in an enlarged group of 15 people. They parked their cars, came out and started swearing at the Roma. Four or five people tried to negotiate with the police but the officers started beating and kicking them. Then, four Roma were taken to the police station for identity checks. One of them was detained, because there were pending charges against him. The others were released around 4 a.m. It is important to point out that according to Greek law the breach of peace should be sanctioned by fines. GHM contacted the police station in question to find out more about the case and see if the behavior of the police -besides the beating- was discriminatory in its essence. Senior police officer, Mr. Boutsikas, claimed that this was the sixth time within a month that the Roma disturbed the neighborhood with loud music and celebrations. He argued that there was no other way for the police to approach the problem but take more drastic measures, which did not, however, imply the use of force. He denied the statements made by the Roma regarding the beating of five of their fellows and the slapping in the face of two women. He also claimed that the police had acted according to orders to look in the camp for a Roma person who had been convicted in absentia and was wanted by the police. That is why some people were taken to the police station and checked. He finished by stating that he knows all the Roma since 1985 and he had never had problems with them and that these very Roma are relatively well integrated.

***b.) Case of Nikos Katsaris in Nafplio***

Nikos Katsaris, a 23-year-old Rom living in the Chalandri camp, was in a car heading towards Nafplio with his father, his underage brother and a cousin. This happened on Sunday (12/9/1999) when Mr. Katsaris wanted to take advantage of the weekend to look around the countryside for cheap professional cars. He was hoping to find good bargains there and expected to get in touch with the seller immediately, in case he found something nice and convenient, by noting down the seller's name and mobile phone number. He was planning to first check out all interesting cars, without having to deal with chatty sales people, and then call the owner of the car and ask about the price. All three open air car markets were surrounded by barbed wire which made access difficult and risky. While leaving the third such market, a police car with three officers drove towards them. The Roma were asked to stop their car and get out of it. Pointing out their guns, the policemen put all four of them in the position of body control (hands up with backs turned at the policemen) and started searching for guns. One of the policemen was swearing at them all the time, while kicking and beating them. The Roma claimed that they had come only to look for cars to buy and not to steal, which was the suspicion of the police. They tried to show the officer the notes with names and mobile phones taken by Nikos so as to prove that they had no malicious intentions. They were taken to the police station and were kept in two separate cells with 10 other people, mostly immigrants awaiting deportation. They were detained because the police found some court decisions against Nikos and his father. The other two were released the very same day while Nikos and his father were finally set free after their relatives paid the bail on the next day.

Minister's Office for the Quality of Life concerning the Roma residents of the island. GHM has informed Mr. F. Stamos and other officials from the Prime Minister's Office about the situation in Kefallonia and they committed themselves to look into the matter and include the Roma of the island in one of the existing governmental programs for housing and education. The invitation to the mayor of Kefallonia was to be the first step in this direction. However, a month after the invitation was sent, there was still no official reply by the mayor.

## **7.) Roma in Chalandri/Athens. Latest on the housing issue**

*August 3, 1999 Contact with the deputy mayor of the municipality of Halandri, Ms. Sirmopoulos.*

Ms. Sirmopoulos, deputy mayor of the municipality of Chalandri, contacted the GHM office in order to update the organization on the latest developments and initiatives, taking place in the municipality, regarding the Roma residents of the area. According to Ms. Sirmopoulos, the municipality's legal advisor spent the whole summer trying to locate the owners of the land on which the Roma camped. The idea was to try and persuade the owners to agree to lease the area to the Roma for a certain period of time, till a permanent solution is found. Ms. Sirmopoulos claimed that all of them were against this idea. GHM countered this allegation, saying that the main owner of the land, Ms. Maounis, had accepted the proposal in the presence of Coalition MP Ms. S. Alfieri. Her agreement was sufficient, because she owns the biggest part of the land which is good enough to temporarily accommodate all the Roma of the region. In this light, the negative reaction of the others was not a real problem. Ms. Sirmopoulos did not respond to this argument and made an alternative proposal. She said that a new road is being planned to go through exactly this piece of land, so a large part of it would be expropriated by the state anyway. Since the relevant bureaucratic procedures are time-consuming, the expropriation is expected to be over in four to five years. That is more or less the estimated time for the compensations to be decided and given to the owners and the works for the new road to start. As the land will be expropriated anyway, the owners, even if they wished to, would not be able to evict the Roma since no such court decision can be implemented in a property which does not belong to them anymore. The Roma will be able to use this period of four to five years, together with the authorities, to look deeper into the matter and find alternative solutions for a permanent settlement of the problem. GHM asked whether this suggestion comprises, in essence, a guarantee on behalf of the municipality that for this period the Roma will have no problems living in the area. She did not commit herself to a firm promise. She stated, however, that it is in the interest of the municipality to include the Roma in one of the existing EU-sponsored programs. As a first step prior to this inclusion, the municipality decided to carry out research on the Roma of Chalandri which is planned to be finished by October 1999. Ms. Sirmopoulos promised to inform GHM on the results of this research.

## **8.) Police brutality against Roma**

*a.) Kalogreza*

The majority of these people came from Western Thrace to Athens in search of a more prosperous future. They settled down in the area of Gazi, one of the oldest central districts of Athens. They rented dilapidated houses. The rent for these houses is severely overblown when one takes into account their quality and infrastructure. One way or another, Gazi was one of the few areas in Athens where they could afford renting a place and, even more, where they could find owners willing to lease their houses to them. Some had contracts and receipts from the rents, others did not have any documentation, since many of the owners avoided declaring their income from the rent to the tax authorities.

This “black house market” caused an enormous number of problems after the earthquake. In order to seek compensation from the authorities and get provisional financial aid, earthquake victims need a valid certificate which proves permanent residence in one of the buildings declared unsuitable for housing. Many of them do not possess such a certificate and, even worse, are unaware of their rights as quake-stricken citizens. They were never informed by the authorities about the possibilities to have their rents subsidized by the state or about the provisional aid package of 200,000 Drachmas per family for the coverage of the immediate expenses. All the information they had access to came from the media. Some of them, mainly those who had contracts, certificates from the tax authorities or statements by the owner of the house managed to get financial aid. Others presented telephone bills, water and electricity bills in their name and, at the address of a dilapidated building. They are still waiting for their money, not knowing for sure if they will ever get it. The high illiteracy rate, present as much with the older generation as with the children, makes dealings with the authorities a quite perplexing experience.

Progressive Left Coalition deputy, Mustafa Mustafa, elected in the wider district of Thrace, paid them a visit with his associates and tried to update them on the governmental measures related to the earthquake victims and their chances to get help from the state. Representatives from a cultural association of Muslims in Southern Greece were also present during this visit. Coalition deputy Maria Damanakis also brought the issue before the municipal council of Athens. Only few newspapers wrote on the problems of this group of people. Last but not least, many of the victims reported that there is little hope for them to move back into their old houses even after they are repaired. The owners of the buildings have given no positive signs that they would ever fix their buildings in the first place and that they would allow the old residents to rent them again. Because of the dramatically increasing need for free houses, rents have already risen, making it almost impossible for an average Roma family to afford paying them. Some of them are afraid that they would be forced to abandon life in the capital and return to Thrace.

#### **6.) Roma in Argostoli/Kefallonia (Ionian Islands)**

*September 3, 1999 Complete disregard of the mayor of Kefallonia of an invitation from GHM.*

In August 1999 GHM sent by fax an invitation to the mayor of Kefallonia to come to Athens and engage in a discussion with governmental representatives from the Prime

Ms. Yaniri expressed her delight at the retraction of the statement. She commended people of authority who, having insulted a whole group of people even unintentionally, publicly retract their statements and admit their mistake. The reporter also expressed the view that in any case the sincerity and goodwill of this retraction can be evaluated only in practice. Moreover, she attributed the retraction to the relevant press release issued by the non-governmental organizations. As far as the alleged misquotation of the Mayor's statements was concerned, Ms. Yaniri claimed that there was nothing like that. She argued that she had insisted on taking an appropriate answer by the Mayor who restricted himself in simply stating: "Gypsy stories. This is enough." With a slight tone of irony she ended her counter-response by stating that she had only regretted the omission of the Mayor's last phrase: "For meeting the needs of more or less everybody, I distributed around 850 tents. The Tsigani (Roma) are only 15% of the population."

On September 20, Greek Helsinki Monitor, Minority Rights Group-Greece, Doctors of the World and DROM Network for Roma Social Rights wrote a letter to *Eleftherotypia* (addressed to the director and the reporter herself) arguing that the Mayor of Zefyri should not be allowed to argue that he had been misquoted since he never bothered to retract similar statements made in *Avgi* several days prior to that (on September 12, 1999). The letter was never published. The issue was also brought before the OSCE and, through the response of the Greek delegation, Mr. Zervas was forced to proceed to a second retraction, pleading misquotation again. In addition, he expressed his "sincere regret for the pain his statement has caused" and invoked his "active participation in the Administrative Council of the Roma Network of Greece and fruitful cooperation with the Roma."

On September 22, the Greek delegation's answer to GHM and MRG-G's presentation in the OSCE meeting included an apology by the Zefyri mayor (see page 13 above).

#### **5.) Roma earthquake victims in Gazi (Athens)**

On September 24, 1999, GHM paid a visit to the Gazi camp of local quake-stricken residents. The Muslim Roma from Western Thrace who live there identify themselves as Turks when in Thrace and as Muslims when in Athens. Faced with the same problems of poverty and social exclusion as the rest of the Roma population in Athens and Greece, following the earthquake they moved to live in tents in a park and set up a camp. Their old and dilapidated rented homes were severely damaged by the earthquake and experts found them unsuitable for housing. 50-60 families, or approximately 500-600 people, live in tents in an area with only one water tap and a few makeshift toilets. Tents were given to them by the municipality of Athens and by the Red Cross. Still, the Roma claimed that the tents were not enough to cover their needs and were not distributed proportionally to the number of family members. Food supply is not provided on a regular basis. Almost every day they get sandwiches and bottles of water. Occasionally they receive bottles of milk for the children and, in the two weeks of their stay there, they have gotten spaghetti only once. The municipality installed a mobile medical clinic and a doctor pays visits to the camp on a daily basis. However, neither social workers, nor schoolteachers have been sent by the authorities to look after the children and to provide them with psychologic help, the way this was done in other camps.

2. all municipal factions of Zefyri and all political parties, in particular those which supported the Mayor's recent election, to denounce these statements and ask him to retract and apologize to the Roma, or else to politically isolate him.

#### **APPENDIX n. 1**

On September 12, 1999 the same Mayor made similar statements in the *Avgi* daily. We quote the relevant part which makes even clearer the racist attitude of the Mayor towards the Roma residents of Zefyri.

**“I think that we should be particularly satisfied with the mobilization of the municipality of Zefyri. We have all been working round the clock. We only faced problems with the Tsigani, who looted tents, made business by selling them, engaged into fights with the citizens of the municipality, walloped municipal employees and created enough problems with the aid distribution. We were forced to bring the Special Police Forces to allow us do our job.”**

#### **APPENDIX n. 2**

Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms:

**No one shall be subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment**

Article 6.2 of the same Convention:

**Everyone charged with a criminal offense shall be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law.**

Article 14 of the same Convention:

**The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, color, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.**

Article 4c of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

**States parties condemn all propaganda and all organization which are based on ideas or theories of superiority of one race or group of persons of one color or ethnic origin, or which attempt to justify or promote racial hatred and discrimination in any form, and undertake to adopt immediate and positive measures designed to eradicate all incitement to, or acts of, such discrimination and, to this end, with due regard to the principles embodied in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the rights expressly set forth in article 5 of this Convention inter alia:**

(...)

**.. shall not permit public authorities or public institutions, national or local, to promote or incite racial discrimination.**

Following the joint press release, the Mayor of Zefyri contacted *Eleftherotypia*, protesting that he had been misquoted by the reporter, Ms. Yaniri and that he had anything but the intention to insult the Roma collectively. Mr. Zervas explained that he had referred only to the Roma who appointed themselves presidents of the Roma and who did nothing but systematically complain in public, so that they legitimize their presence and role.

**DROM NETWORK FOR THE ROMA SOCIAL RIGHTS  
EUROPEAN ROMA RIGHTS CENTER  
GREEK HELSINKI MONITOR  
MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP - GREECE**

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**PRESS RELEASE**

**14/9/1999**

**TOPIC: APPEAL FOR DENUNCIATION OF RACIST STATEMENTS BY,  
AND FOR POSSIBLE POLITICAL ISOLATION OF, THE ZEFYRI MAYOR**

The non-governmental organizations **Doctors of the World, DROM Network for Roma Social Rights, European Roma Rights Center, Greek Helsinki Monitor, and Minority Rights Group-Greece** call upon the Greek government, the Central Association of Local Authorities of Greece (KEDKE), the political parties and the municipal factions of Zefyri to denounce yesterday's racist statements by the Mayor Apostolos Zervas, regarding the Roma residents of the municipality of Zefyri and to politically isolate him, in case he does not retract.

Answering to the allegations by Roma earthquake victims that they are systematically ignored in the aid supply, the Mayor stated: "Gypsy stories [Gyftikes/Gypsy in Greek is pejorative]. Do not bother me more with the Tsigani. Because of them, the aid mechanism is inefficient. They have been robbing the whole world" (the *Eleftherotypia* daily, 14/9/1999, p. 53).

The statements are racist and constitute "group libel" of a part of the population with cultural specificities. In addition to the unimaginable suffering of all earthquake victims, Roma and non-Roma alike, and to the extremely difficult situation in which they are today, these statements constitute "inhuman and degrading treatment," violating Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The argument that the Roma are guilty of crimes of robbery violates the presumption of innocence of a group of citizens with specific cultural characteristics (article 6.2 combined with article 14 of the same Convention). Coming from a Mayor, such statement also contradicts article 4c of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination which commits "the state parties (...) to undertake to adopt immediate and positive measures designed to eradicate all incitement to, or acts of, such discrimination (...) among others, in order not to permit public authorities or public institutions, national or local, to promote or incite racial discrimination."

For that reason our organizations call upon:

1. the Greek government and the Central Association of Local Authorities of Greece (KEDKE) to unequivocally denounce these statements and to indicate what other measures will they take to implement the aforementioned article 4c.

In view of the above, we hope that you will personally make sure that society-stricken Roma are treated on an equal basis as our recently quake-stricken fellow citizens and that there is no discrimination between them. Thus, in three, or even six or nine months, all these Greek citizens can have homes and the impression that the Greek state and society are indifferent, if not accessory to the marginalization of thousands of Roma will be dispelled.

We hope, therefore, that on Wednesday 22/9/1999, when the matter is again discussed at the OSCE Review Conference 1999 in Vienna, the government will give convincing and strictly binding answers to this request.

Yours sincerely,

The representatives of the organizations:

Doctors of the World (Yannis Boukovinas)  
Drom Network for the Roma Social Rights (Thanassis Triarides)  
European Roma Rights Center (Dimitrina Petrova)  
Greek Helsinki Monitor (Panayote Dimitras)  
Minority Rights Group-Greece (Nafsika Papanikolatos)

The open letter to the Greek Prime Minister, C. Simitis, was also covered by the press. On September 21 two dailies -*Elefthrotypia* and *Avgi*- made extensive reference to the content of the letter and the parallels drawn by the five non-governmental organizations between the earthquake victims and the Roma tent-dwellers.

#### **4.) Racist statements by the mayor of Zefyri, Apostolos Zervas**

***International law violation by the Mayor of Zefyri. NGOs ask him to retract his statement. In case he does not do that, they urge all parties and municipal factions to isolate him politically.***

The mayor of Zefyri, Apostolos Zervas, gave two press interviews following the magnitude-5.9 earthquake in Athens. He answered questions about the measures taken by the municipality in favor of the earthquake victims. While doing that, he made some explicitly racist statements, accusing the Roma in his municipality of committing robberies and putting the blame for the inefficiency of the aid mechanism on them. He portrayed the Roma as ruthless robbers who steal the tents bound to the quake-stricken people and who make business by selling them. The statements were oversweeping and directed to the whole Roma community, even though the mayor did not have any proof of guilt. The interviews were published in *Avgi* (12/9/1999) and *Eleftherotypia* (14/9/1999). The very same day (14/9/1999), Greek Helsinki Monitor, Minority Rights Group-Greece, Doctors of the World and DROM Network for Roma Social Rights issued a joint press release on the matter. That press release was co-signed by the European Roma Rights Center.

**DOCTORS OF THE WORLD**

adopt the temporary solution of prefab settlements in areas that each municipality will indicate. For this to happen, roads will have to be cut and power/water supplies must be connected so as to ensure proper living conditions for the dwellers. However, these settlements too will be of a temporary nature, as it is planned to have the quake-stricken people back in their homes within a period of three months” (*Eleftherotypia* 14/9/1999, p.50).

Equally welcome was the government’s promise that:

“Apart from the tents, the settlements will have chemical toilets, drinking water, electricity either through the public power supply or through army generators, as well as medical staff and army ambulances” (*Avgi* 10/9/1999, p.7).

We believe that these correct views, which are being implemented at a quick pace today, despite the difficulties that arise because of the usual inefficiency of the public administration, led you three years ago to announce a similar plan for the improvement of the situation of the Roma tent-dwellers in Greece.

Unfortunately, as it is evident today, only few kilometers away from the earthquake camps of Ano Liosia (just like in numerous other settlements throughout the rest of the country), Roma tent-dwellers live “next to and outside society” and continue “to face hardship and worse luck” to quote the above statement. They are “society-stricken” fellow citizens, obviously victims of extensive racism against them, which you yourself denounced in public two years ago. It is possible that you have not been informed that certain municipalities which immediately found sites for their quake-stricken citizens, only a month ago denied that there were such sites available for the socially outcast Roma.

Today the state declares and shows its ability to implement Article 21.4 of the Constitution for the housing of the homeless at a quick pace. This reinforces the impression throughout the world that the pending Roma settlement problem stems from lack of political will to fulfill your declarations in conjunction with strong racism on the part of some local authorities. Racism is unfortunately evident these days also in the attitude of certain people towards quake-stricken, until now settled, Roma that has been reported by media all over the world.

We would like to point out that, in March 1999, our organizations along with the **Progressive Left Coalition** political party, submitted to the **Prime Minister’s Office for the Quality of Life** a draft law -product of their long experience with settlements- for the creation of self- managed Roma settlements with every requirement for the improvement of their living conditions and their smooth integration into society. This proposal is already being implemented, even with considerable delay and after a lot of pressure, in the settlement of Agia Sofia Gonou (Thessaloniki). Unfortunately, the Ministry of the Interior, which is responsible for tabling such a bill in Parliament, has not looked into the matter and has arbitrarily canceled even the formation of a **Committee for the Problems of Roma Tent-Dwellers** which was decided by government officials, non-governmental organizations and Roma organizations, after a meeting in the Ministry of the Interior, in mid-June 1999.

the OSCE on the Roma in Greece. This very report addressed the inertia and the lack of good will on the part of the government for three years now, despite the 1996 promises and announcements. Let us hope that from now on, the interest of the Greek state will be expressed in something more than a paper...

*The report is similar to the Avgi one and covers the question in the same light.*

**3.) Joint Letter of Doctors of the World, DROM Network for Roma Social Rights, European Roma Rights Center, Greek Helsinki Monitor and Minority Rights Group-Greece to the Greek Prime Minister, Mr. Costas Simitis, drawing parallels between the Athens earthquake victims and the Roma.**

**DOCTORS OF THE WORLD  
DROM NETWORK FOR ROMA SOCIAL RIGHTS  
EUROPEAN ROMA RIGHTS CENTER  
GREEK HELSINKI MONITOR  
MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP - GREECE**

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**OPEN LETTER**

Mr. Costas Simitis  
Prime Minister of Greece

Athens, 20 September 1999

**TOPIC: ROMA (GYPSIES) ARE GREEK CITIZENS TOO...**

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

The co-operating non-governmental organizations **Doctors of the World, Drom Network for Roma Social Rights, European Roma Rights Center, Greek Helsinki Monitor** and **Minority Rights Group-Greece** were pleased to hear the following statement you made concerning the housing of the quake-stricken people:

“This is a temporary arrangement that will last a few weeks. Then there will come a second phase, with more permanent constructions, which, however, we are also going to limit as much as possible, because we do not want to create a class of citizens that lives next to and outside society. In no way indeed does the government wish to let the matter of the quake-stricken people, people facing hardship and worse luck than the rest of us, lie over” (*Eleftherotypia* 11/9/1999, p.4).

The statement of Minister of the Interior Vaso Papandreou was also welcome:

“It is the intention of the Ministry of the Interior to have the quake-stricken people settled in tents for the next three weeks; afterwards we are going to

organizations refer to the Roma as if they were a minority. Here we publish the whole text of the organizations' report, so that the readers draw their own conclusions.

*Stohos is a nationalist paper, which has attacked Greek Helsinki Monitor and Minority Rights Group-Greece on numerous occasions, due to their public statements, reports and press releases on human and minority rights violations in Greece. The report is negative even though not reaching the utmost "hate speech" that Stohos is capable of producing. Moreover, ironically enough, this is the only newspaper that uses the term "Roma" instead of "Tsigani" and, even more importantly, reprints the extensive report in whole. Last but not least, despite its marginal audience, Stohos has a substantial circulation.*

### **On the parliamentary question following the publication of the report to the OSCE:**

**8/9/1999: Avgi**, p. 24

#### How Long Will They Wait?

Progressive Left Coalition deputy, Maria Damanakis, brought to the attention of the Greek Parliament and, in particular, of the Minister of the Interior, Ms. V. Papandreou, the report of three non-governmental organizations (Doctors of the World, Minority Rights Group-Greece and Greek Helsinki Monitor). The report deals with the status of the Roma in Greece (housing, education, police brutality and health issues). The main question that the deputy addressed to Ms. Papandreou was whether she was planning to introduce to Parliament the existing draft law on self-managed Roma camps. How long will the Roma have to wait?

*A report with positive comments on the deputy's initiative and the issue of Roma rights itself. The NGOs' concern with the fate of the Roma was considered to be very timely, especially after the last damaging earthquake in Athens. The reporter, through her questions and the invocation of sympathy for the Roma both in the title and the concluding sentence, creates the impression of emergency, countered by state indifference and inertia. Regardless of the fact that it is short, the report is very positive.*

### **Also on the same subject:**

**8/9/1999: Eleftherotypia** [Ioana Sotirhu], p. 9

#### For the Tsigani

What will be the measures taken for each case reported to the OSCE? When will the Minister of the Interior, Ms. V. Papandreou, introduce the draft law on the creation of self-managed camps for the Roma in Greece? These were the two questions addressed to the Minister of the Interior by the Coalition MP Maria Damanakis on September 7, 1999. The questions were provoked by the GHM, MRG-G and DW common report to

## **B. Other reactions**

**a.) *Progressive Left Coalition deputy, M. Damanakis, brings the report to the attention of the Greek Parliament and of the Minister of the Interior, V. Papandreou.***

Progressive Left Coalition deputy M. Damanakis addressed a question to the Minister of the Interior, Ms. Vaso Papandreou, on September 7, 1999. In it the MP brought to the limelight the denunciations, which a number of Greek NGOs made in their report to the OSCE. Ms. Damanakis was entitled to a written response from the Minister, because the question had been addressed before the summer parliamentary working group. So far, no response has been given. The question was formulated in two parts:

- a.) What will be the measures taken by the Ministry for the improvement of the living conditions of the Roma in Greece?
- b.) Does the Ministry intend to submit to Parliament the draft law on the self-managed camps of the Roma?

**b.) *Part from the GHM September 1999, report to the ERRC on the coverage of the Roma in the Greek press.***

**7/8/1999: *Eleftherotypia*, [Ioana Sotirhu], p. 18**

### **Tell Me Lies, Tell Me Big, Big Lies**

The findings of three governmental organizations, as presented at the latest OSCE Implementation Meeting, show that Roma in Greece are a marginalized and persecuted group. Despite the ambitious plans and announcements, so far the Roma have seen nothing but broken promises. Reportedly, five Roma camps have been evicted in the last few years, nine are threatened with eviction, five are destitute and three are official “ghettos.” Even Roma who were included in some university educational programs did not escape eviction. In most cases, evictions are taking place in the district of Athens and are attributed to the forthcoming Olympic Games and the need to reconstruct the wider area.

*A very positive report, summarizing the main parts of the findings of the Greek Helsinki Monitor, Minority Rights Group-Greece and Doctors of the World presented to the OSCE meeting.*

**Also on the same subject:**

**8/9/1999: *Stohos*, p. 4 and 6.**

### **New Report on the Living Conditions of the Roma and Accusations Against Greece**

The well-known organizations Greek Helsinki Monitor, Minority Rights Group-Greece and Doctors of the World presented a report to the OCSE on the situation of the Greek Roma tent-dwellers. As expected, this report makes reference to the “ill-treatment” of the Roma by the Greek state. It is worthwhile mentioning that the

In training and employment, specific programs are carried out to fight the exclusion of Romas from the work market.

In health, the programs carried out are adapted to the specific needs of the Roma population, and cover such areas of public health as immunization, distribution of information on health and hygiene, etc.

In culture, a special office has been established at the Ministry of Culture which deals with Gypsy cultural matters, while research projects are undertaken aiming at the study and preservation of Gypsy art, Gypsy ways of life, etc.

In order to better co-ordinate the various agencies involved in the implementation of Government projects, and also in order to inform the public and sensitize public opinion, the Government is now proceeding to the creation of a National Council on Policy for Greek Gypsies, which will include as members, in addition to Government officials, representatives of Roma associations, the inter-municipal ROM Network and NGOs.

Mr. Chairman,

As I said earlier, the Government efforts proceed at a slower pace than we would have liked and encounter various impediments. I have already mentioned bureaucratic sluggishness as one of the latter. Another important, but not unexpected, reason for the slow progress achieved is the fact that the Government programs must, at all stages, be inclusive of those concerned, i.e., the Roma themselves, and not be carried out in their absence. Consensus is therefore vital; and building it -a time consuming exercise under all circumstances- is particularly arduous when dealing with a social group composed of smaller groups, scattered around the country, which do not easily speak in one voice.

Another serious obstacle to the Government efforts is prejudice toward the Gypsies, which, bred over many long years, is still widespread among large segments of the population and is hard to eradicate. Such prejudice, which finds expression in everyday life, takes on more alarming and dangerous character when it is displayed by police officers or by elected officials at the local administration level. We regret –and condemn- the incidents of racist remarks by elected officials and violent acts by police officers mentioned earlier by the representatives of two Greek NGOs.

Mr. Chairman,

The representative of a Greek NGO who spoke earlier mentioned some racist remarks about Greek Romas attributed to the mayor of the town of Zefyri, near Athens. A few minutes ago I spoke to that mayor, Apostolos Zervas. He assured me that he had been misquoted by the media. But he also asked me, in any case, to express here on his behalf his sincere regret for the pain his statement has caused to the people who are dear to him and with whom he has been working for years, being himself, among other things, a member of the Administrative Council of the ROM Network of Greece.

Thank you Mr. Chairman

STATEMENT MADE BY THE GREEK DELEGATION  
ON ROMA & SINTI

(Vienna, 22 September 1999)

Last year, when I spoke on the subject of Roma and Sinti at the Warsaw Human-Dimension Implementation Review Meeting, I made two main points: (a) that the situation of the Roma in Greece is, in the eyes of the Greek Government, unsatisfactory and indeed unacceptable, and (b) that the Greek Government is determined to do everything in its power to remedy the situation.

I wish to assure this forum, and in particular those with more direct interest in the matter, that the determination of the Government of Greece has not changed. As for the first point mentioned above, namely, the real situation of the Roma in Greece, I wish I were in a position to say that it has changed dramatically for the better. The truth is that, although things have been improving, they have been doing so at a much slower pace than we in the Government would have liked. At the same time, although the pace of change is often frustratingly slow, it would be fair to admit that it is not slower than an objective observer would expect, given the specific circumstances in which it is taking place.

The sluggishness of bureaucracy in its every endeavor is not the least of the impediments encountered by the Government in this case. But I will say more on impediments in a minute.

Mr. Chairman,

Since 1996, the efforts of the Greek Government for the improvement of the living conditions of the Roma have been carried out in the framework of the Program of Social Integration of Greek Gypsies, which includes five main areas of projects, i.e., Housing, Education, Training-Employment, Health, Culture. Without even attempting to go into details, I will outline some salient features of those projects:

In housing, Government efforts concentrate on (a) finding permanent solutions, through the construction of houses, the allocation of land, and the granting of housing loans, and (b) on creating settlements of a transitional nature until permanent solutions are found.

In education, a 3-year project is now in progress, carried out by the Ministry of Education in co-operation with the University of Ioannina, which aims at providing continuous education to teachers of Roma children, publication of teaching materials, strengthening intercultural schools, helping high school students, etc. Also, in order to facilitate pupils who move frequently from one to another, the system of the individual transit-pupil card has been introduced.

morning prayer or the subject of religion and they have to parade on national holidays wearing Greek national costumes (foustanela - kind of Greek kilt).

In Greece, most Roma and almost all tent dwelling Roma speak the Romanes language. That is why it is necessary to have the Greek language taught to them as a second language at school, along with making available boosting teaching material. The **Ministry of Education** has no such systematic program although it has generously funded with billions of drachmas research on Roma children's education with ambiguous results. Rare exceptions are due to the initiative and will of the teachers themselves at school like the 6<sup>th</sup> Primary School of Evosmos and the 8<sup>th</sup> Primary School of Nea Zoe in Aspropyrgos. The **DROM Network for the Social Rights of the Roma** has experimented -with volunteers- an appropriately adapted program with Roma children of the Gallikos river (former Evosmos settlement).

## **Health**

An international survey by the **Doctors of the World** (ROMEUROPE Program, Medecins du Monde, Juin 1999) directly associates the odious living conditions in the settlements with the poor health of Roma tent-dwellers. The results of hepatitis tests in Nea Liossia and Aspropyrgos are significant: 99% of the population has been exposed to hepatitis A. The same percentage for Hepatitis B is 50%: 18% are carriers while the healthy remainder of 32% are adolescents aged 10 - 18, most of which go to school. These percentages do not seem high only in relation to those of the rest of the population. Comparative data from other European cities show that percentages of Roma tent-dwellers in Greece with health problems are higher (42% for the women, 32% for the men). Roma access to the health system is insignificant. The **Doctors of the World** have found complete lack of first aid, vaccination and medical information. Roma do not trust hospitals and First Aid Services, while they find it impossible to follow the pace and procedures in practice in these institutions (except for cases when the doctor has created an atmosphere of trust). Only 15% of them receive benefits. Out of the 40% of Roma who have social security, only 30% are fully covered. These percentages are less than half of the equivalent average for Roma in other European cities.

\*The report is available at the following Internet addresses:

<http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/pdf/osce-roma-eng.PDF>

<http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/english/reports/osce-roma-sept-99.html>

## **2.) Reactions to the OSCE report**

### **A. Greek government answer**



**PERMANENT MISSION  
OF GREECE TO THE OSCE**

living. Initially the settlement had two lavatories and water but no electricity, forcing Roma to steal power from a nearby pole. From 1996 until today there has been no improvement.

### **Police Violence**

The case of ill-treatment of two Roma youths - arrested for attempted ice-cream theft - E. Kotropoulos and L. Bekos, at the Mesolongi police station (5/1998) has not yet resulted in the removal of the indicted policemen from the local police station, despite the unambiguous forensic report, the charges brought by the victims, the active involvement of Greek and international non-governmental organizations with letters of protest and memos to competent authorities, even despite the District Attorney's prosecution – "for tortures and other deeds that are offensive to human dignity." The victims have repeatedly being pressed by the policemen to stop the proceedings against them. Meanwhile, the Sworn Administrative Investigation that was ordered by the police and the Ministry for Public Order has not come up with a conclusion a year after the incident, neither has a trial date been set.

In the case of the murder of Rom A. Celal by policemen in Partheni, Salonica, it took the involvement of Greek and international non-governmental organizations and charges brought by the victim's father to have a Sworn Administrative Investigation by the police and the Ministry for Public Order, as well as a forensic report. The District Attorney's office in charge announced that three policemen were being prosecuted for - among other offenses - murder, attempted murder, illegal possession and use of firearms. In this case too, the Sworn Administrative Investigation has not come up with a conclusion as yet, neither has a trial date been set.

Finally, in November 1996 during a police round-up in Viotia, Rom A. Mouratis, father of 6 children, was murdered in cold blood. While he was lying on the ground at gun-point, Mouratis raised his head to take a look at his children who were also on the ground. This movement was considered "threatening" by a policeman who shot and killed the Rom. The officer was suspended while the Sworn Administrative Investigation was in progress. He was also indicted by the District Attorney, but he was released pending trial.

### **Education**

The percentage of illiteracy among Greek Roma remains at the same high levels - 80%, reaching 90% occasionally. From comparative data of the **Doctors of the World** it becomes apparent that the percentage of Roma tent-dwellers who can write and read is 6% in Athens and 60% in Montpellier, France. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Primary School of **Zefyri (Attica)** is an example of racist attitude: this mixed school became an exclusively Roma school as non-Roma parents transferred their children to other schools by declaring false addresses. Another discrimination is observed in **Xanthi (Thrace)**. **Minority Rights Group - Greece** and **Greek Helsinki Monitor** have found that Muslim Roma children attend the Greek school program even though Greece is obliged, according to the Treaty of Lausanne, to offer them, just like every other Muslim, minority education; these children are not exempted from attending the

solution to the housing problem of the city's Roma. In 1997 the municipality of Kalamata filed a suit against 70 Roma families in the industrial quarter of Kalamata where they had been living for about 5 years. The reasoning for the eviction was that the area was going to be reconstructed. After the reaction of an adjacent community against Roma settling there and following continued and strenuous pressing by local non-governmental organizations, a proposal for purchase of building plots in another area was adopted. The land will be bought by the Prefecture with subsidization by the Ministry of Environment. The procedure of the relocation is under way.

**Argostoli Kefalonia (Ionian Islands)** After they had been turned away from the beach, 11 families - about 100 people - were moved to the slaughter-house grounds, on the initiative of the local authorities. The stink of the slaughter-house and the sandy soil that absorbed the sun's heat in summer made life in the tin huts insufferable. When the municipality took over the slaughter-house, the stink was considerably reduced. At the same time the municipality has tried to improve living conditions. Nevertheless, the situation remains unpleasant. There are lavatories, two main water pumps and electricity. Regardless of the effort made on the question of temporary housing, Roma are still facing health, educational and professional problems which in some cases keep getting worse.

**Sofades, Karditsa (Thessaly)** 500 families – 2,500 people in all - live in a built-up area where apart from 100 detached houses there are huts and tents. The roads have been paved with asphalt, there is water, electricity, lavatories and rubbish bins. Provision has been made to let the tent-dwellers have the grounds of the rubbish dump from the year 2000 on, as soon as the dump is closed down.

**Chios (Aegean Islands)** In early 1997, on the mayor's initiative, 10 Roma families were allotted land by the island's ecclesiastical authorities. The local people and the Police Commissioner reacted negatively to the settlement of these Roma in the area.

### **E. "Official Ghetto" Settlements (3)**

**Trikala - Raxa area (Thessaly).** Roma from various parts of Trikala were moved to the Raxa area with the promise that the site would function as an organized camp. In May 1998, the water was cut off without warning. Local authorities neglected to restore water supply which in all probability was cut off by local people who wanted to send Roma away. There are no lavatories or sewage system.

**Patras - Makriyanni area (Peloponese)** In November 1997, local authorities with the consent of 25 Roma families - registered citizens of Patras - pulled down 23 shanties and built up the settlement again after they had evicted all Roma who were not registered citizens of the area. Roma had to make do with a small plot of land which confined them considerably, even though there were lavatories and water supply. In May 1998 the settlement was full of rubbish and dead rats. A year before, 15 cases of meningitis had been reported in the settlement.

**Menemeni (Salonica)** A "model" settlement was put up in an area full of chemical plants and besides an oil pipeline. 24 Roma families - about 120 people - were moved with promises by the authorities that they would be offered the means for a decent

which sent out the images of Roma being held at gun-point by policemen. It was these scenes that triggered the announcement of the **1996 Program**.

**Larissa - Neapoli area (Thessaly)** In May 1998, Roma (about 50 nomad families) were threatened with eviction by the police on orders of the mayor. The majority of these Roma are citizens registered in this area and have been living in the settlement for 30 years.

**Tyrnavos (Thessaly)** 400 Roma families, owners of the land they live on, dwell in tents because of the authorities' refusal to include the area in the city planning scheme, in the hope to discourage their permanent settlement. There is no water or electricity supply, nor a sewage system. Roma have attempted to build lavatories or rooms in order to improve their living conditions themselves but in vain. Local authorities pulled them down and imposed high fines on Roma.

**Tarsina Corinthias (Peloponese)** There has been a similar attempt to coerce Roma as in Tyrnavos. Even though the 60 Roma are legitimate owners of the land, they have been living with zero infrastructure.

### **C. Fully Destitute Settlements (5)**

**Aetoliko (Continental Greece)** 600 people live in 3 settlements in the area. Two of them have water. Even though the prefecture has promised a settlement with all necessary infrastructure, there has been no progress as yet.

**Patras - Kato Souli area (Peloponese)** Near the rubbish dump 30 families have been living for more than 20 years without any infrastructure. The municipality refused to clear up the area for a fee and supply the camp with water. Right next to it, part of the dump that has been planted with saplings and is watered by an automatic irrigation system.

**Lamia - Damaria area (Continental Greece)** At the old quarry of the town, near a stream, about 100 families - 60 members of which are locally registered citizens - live in huts, surrounded by rubbish, with hardly enough water and no other infrastructure.

**Komotini - Teneke Mahala (Thrace)** 350 Muslim Roma families have lived for more than 70 years in tin huts. The scant public lavatories are in bad shape. The decision for their relocation in another area with the help of the Organization of Workers Housing has been pending for many years.

**Halastra (Salonica)** 38 Muslim Roma families have camped since 1989 on a stretch of land belonging to the municipality. These Roma have lived in the area for 35 to 40 years. Their living conditions are squalid as there are no infrastructure except for one water pump.

### **D. Settlements which are somehow supported by the local authorities (4)**

**Kalamata (Peloponese)** Apart from the former barracks of Gonos, the case of the Roma in Kalamata is the only one that apparently progressed positively towards a final

first time municipal workers, in the presence of a numerous police squad, tore down Roma tents which were put up again later.

**Spata (Attica)** In November 1997, there was an attempt to evict 100 Roma from an area where they had been living since 1992. The reasoning for the attempt was illegal building and was based on a court verdict in abstentia. The attempt was carried out in the presence of police and was supported by the local people who did not want the settlement near a newly-built nursery school. Following NGO reactions, the eviction was suspended. The local authorities promised to look into the possibility of relocation in another area. It was proposed to transfer the Roma to an isolated site without any guarantee ensuring decent living conditions. Meanwhile the eviction is pending and Roma still live in Spata without any infrastructure.

**Halandri (Attica)** 13 out of 30 families of the settlement received court-ordered evictions in case judged in abstentia from an area lacking any kind of infrastructure where they have been living for about 20 years. They were charged with trespassing. After strenuous negotiations with the District Attorney and the police that would enforce the decision they were granted an extension until the end of April 1999. As a result of repeated negotiations of the **Cooperating Organizations**, the **Prime Minister's Office for the Quality of Life** and the **Coalition** with the local authorities, it was argued that Roma would lease the site for a period of 6 -12 months until a permanent site for relocation could be found. During a parliamentary debate over the matter initiated by the Coalition, the government promised to subsidize the lease. Although the owners accepted this solution, the municipality has not yet taken action, claiming that the owners could not be located.

**Aspropyrgos (Attica)** In February 1999, local authorities, escorted by the police, set fire to 5 Roma lodgings of the Nea Zoe settlement in Aspropyrgos, where 100 families have been living since 1990. The operation took place in the absence of a District Attorney and without protocols of eviction; it was based only on a discriminatory decision of the Service of City Planning to pull down Roma shacks even though the whole residential area – inhabited by both Roma and non Roma - lacks town planning. **The Cooperating Organizations** and the **Coalition M.P. Ms. Stella Alfieri** pressed charges, while international organizations have protested to the Greek government for violation of international treaties and agreements binding for Greece. This, however, did not prevent the **Deputy Minister of Interior Mr. Florides**, in an answer to a relevant parliamentary question, from trying to justify the use of violence by the municipality, arguing that Roma had taken possession of the area illegally. A few days later, there were threats that the operation would be resumed. Pre-election promises of the municipality that living conditions in the settlement would be improved remained empty words. In the meantime, the **Cooperating Organizations** and the **Prime Minister's Office for the Quality of Life** have proposed a site for the creation of a self-managed Roma settlement of the whole precinct; it is a forest area within the limits of the adjoining municipality of Ano Liossia. **The mayor of Ano Liossia, Mr. Papademas**, rejected this solution while his superior, the elected **Prefect Mr. Papapetros**, has shown no interest whatsoever. The excuse in this case is the alleged construction of Olympic sports facilities both in Nea Zoe and in the forest area. This incident has been the second traumatic experience for the Roma of Aspropyrgos after the violent police raid of 1996 - with machine guns and knives - in front of TV cameras

connected with a water supply or a sewage system) and has been fenced with barbed wire. The new camp is one of the misleading “models.”

**Ioannina (Epiros)** In August 1999 the local authorities evicted 30 Roma families (both Greek and Albanian) from an area lacking infrastructure, where they had lived for 7 years. The first threats of eviction started in May 1999. After an intervention of the researchers of the Ioannina University Roma Program, in which the camp had been included, the authorities withdrew and undertook to look into the possibility of relocation giving a promise which of course they did not keep.

**Trikala - Pyrgos or Agroviz area (Thessaly)** On 29/5/1997 local authorities, in the presence of police, evicted 20 Roma families from the area of Pyrgos and Agroviz after they had been pressed upon by owners of near-by night clubs. These Roma had again been evicted from another area in Trikala 8 years ago.

**Phoenikas (Salonica)** In May 1997 the shanties of a Roma family consisting of 30 members were knocked down by local authorities, the reasoning for this action being that they were illegal, while equally illegal luxurious non-Roma residences in the same area were left untouched.

## **B. Settlements threatened with eviction (9)**

**Aghia Paraskevi (Attica)** In July 1997 the municipality of Aghia Paraskevi tore down 10 out of 28 shanties belonging to Roma who had been living in the area for up to 30 years. Roma had been charged with trespassing on private property and building without a license. A few days later, the mayor attempted to destroy the rest of the shanties in the presence of the police, but failed to do so owing to the intervention of non-governmental organizations. However, the matter is pending as there are protocols of eviction already serviced to the Roma. The municipality claims that there is no available land for relocation, while the adjacent available 35 acres are supposedly intended for the construction of a sports facility in view of the Olympics.

**Nea Alikarnassos (Crete)** Making use of a town council resolution dating from 1997 and arguing that the area was going to be reconstructed, in March 1999 the municipality set about the eviction procedure of the Roma. Protocols of eviction were serviced to 102 families and the question is pending as is an older request for basic infrastructure at the settlement. Roma relocation has not proceeded as none of the neighboring municipalities wanted tent-dwellers at their precincts. Their transfer to a former military barrack and the creation of a self-managed settlement, according to the proposal of the **Cooperating Organizations** with the collaboration of the **Prime Minister's Office for the Quality of Life** met with the stubborn opposition of the mayor who declared his intention to evict the Roma from his town. In November 1997 a violent police raid took place in the settlement after persistent rumors about drug trafficking.

**Trikala - Kokinos Pyrgos area (Thessaly)** Roma tent-dwellers, who camped near a Rudar settlement (Romanian-speaking people sometimes considered as Roma) on a site lacking infrastructure, in May 1998, were threatened with expulsion twice by the local authorities which, however, did not service them with protocols of eviction. The

implemented, even with considerable delay and after a lot of pressure, in the former military barracks of Gonos in Salonica. Passing this bill through Parliament would have been first in the Committee's agenda, the formation of which was canceled, in an anti-democratic way, by the Ministry of Interior.

At the same time, abuse of violence on Roma by police officers continues: even in cases when policemen have been indicted for homicide or torture, they have not been removed by their department, while Sworn Administrative Investigations and legal proceedings against them advance at a snail's pace. As far as education is concerned, few Roma of compulsory schooling age (between 6 to 15) attend school, certainly not because of their own choice, but owing to indifference, if not racist attitude of state officials. Moreover, comparative international surveys by the **Doctors of the World** showed that the health problems of Roma tent-dwellers in Greece are among the worst in Europe. According to the **Doctors of the World**, also many of the settlements that will be mentioned hereafter are worse than refugee camps in areas of Asia and Africa they have visited.

## **Abandoned or Often Persecuted Destitute Roma Settlements (26)**

### **A. Settlements that were evicted (5)**

**Evosmos (Salonica)** By a court decision, after an appeal by the local authorities and the owners of the land, in 1997 3,500 tent-dwellers were ordered to leave an area with zero infrastructure where they had been living for 30 years. After the intervention of non-governmental organizations, the state undertook to transfer them to a properly arranged area at the former military barracks of Gonos and the eviction was postponed. One year later, construction had not begun, while the adjoining municipalities issued a resolution that they would prevent such relocation even if they had to resort to violence; no authority punished them for this illegal and certainly racist action. At the same time, following action taken by the municipality of Evosmos, Roma were threatened with imprisonment, fines, as well as police violence unless they left. When neighboring municipalities turned them away, they ended up in the dried-up bed of Gallikos river after a month's wandering, in August 1998. After continuous pressure by the **Cooperating Organizations**, charges pressed against competent authorities, publicity in Greek and international media, repeated parliamentary questions by the **Coalition** and after Roma had found themselves in serious danger because of the river floods, the Prefecture of Salonica started the works at the Gonos barracks, but they have been proceeding at a very slow pace and with considerable delay. This relocation is the first one ever carried out by a Prefecture in accordance with the draft bill for the creation of self-managed settlements of the **Cooperating Organizations**, and is implemented under the supervision of the **Prime Minister's Office for the Quality of Life** in collaboration with the **Cooperating Organizations**.

**Ano Liossia (Attica)** In October 1996, under the pretext of a search for drugs, police burst into the Roma camp. Rumors about drug trafficking paved the way for the local authorities to evict the Roma in April 1997. 25 out of 70 families – registered or permanent residents in that municipality- were transferred to metal prefabricated houses in a near-by area. The rest of the tent-dwellers were given an ultimatum to go away. The new site is quite isolated, lacks infrastructure (the houses were never

**for the Quality of Life.** On the other hand, the competent Ministries, first and foremost of which the **Ministry of Interior and Public Administration** have not yet shown the necessary will for the implementation of the declared policy as well as of the respect for Roma rights. Had the ambitious **1996 Program** mentioned above been realized even by 50%, it would have radically changed the living conditions of the Roma of Greece. Apparently, it was confined to free-handed commissioning of programs and subsidies, of a total worth of several billion drachmas (\$1=300drs. app.).

Up to now there is no example of a destitute Roma settlement that has been relocated satisfactorily. On the contrary, numerous communities of Roma tent-dwellers were evicted or threatened with eviction, or, worse still, relocated in allegedly “model settlements” which are nothing but “models of deception of the government” by local authorities in collaboration with other public agencies. It is also characteristic that even shabby Roma camps that had been included in university research programs worth billions of drachmas were similarly faced with the ill-feeling of the local authorities, with no reaction by the government or the academic community, with only few exceptions. It must be pointed out here that the relocation of the largest Roma tent-dwelling community of Evosmos - from the river Gallikos where they have been living for a year to the former military barracks of Gonos - which will hopefully become the first real “model,” has been officially decided but not yet carried out. The government, under pressure by the **Cooperating Organizations** and the **Progressive Left Coalition** political party, has been declaring since September 1998 that the construction of the infrastructure will take 3 - 4 months to complete: 12 months have gone by and construction has merely started.

It is also worth mentioning that the greatest number of evictions has taken place in Greater Athens that will host the **2004 Olympic Games**: the local authorities almost always put forward the necessity to build sports facilities, when they decide to evict Roma from a site or to refuse their transferring to another area. Will the international community and the **International Olympic Committee** allow a “cleansing” of Athens similar to that of Mexico in 1968? Finally, what exemplifies the absence of will of competent authorities with the Roma tent-dwellers in question and the non-governmental organizations promoting solutions to their problems is the arbitrary decision of the **Ministry of Interior** to call off the formation of a **Committee for the Problems of the Roma Tent-Dwellers**. In mid-June 1999, after a meeting in this very Ministry of the parties concerned, it was decided to create such committee that would have been made up of government officials, non-governmental organizations and Roma organizations.

Moreover, the Ministry of the Interior has the task to control the legality of the local authorities' actions. It also has to introduce a legal framework binding for the local authorities. Besides, the provision of shelter to homeless Greek citizens is a constitution provision (article 21, paragraph 4): the state ought to have - but has not had for 25 years - relevant laws that ensure the implementation of this article. In spring 1999, the **Cooperating Organizations** in collaboration with the **Coalition** submitted at the **Prime Minister's Office for the Quality of Life** a draft bill -the end product of their long experience with settlements- for the creation of self-managed Roma settlements that would meet every requirement for the improvement of living conditions and their smooth integration in society. This proposal is already being

**CO-OPERATING ORGANIZATIONS  
FOR THE RIGHTS OF TENT-DWELLING ROMA IN GREECE\***

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**REPORT ON GREECE TO THE OSCE REVIEW CONFERENCE 1999**

22 September 1999

**Roma Rights**

**Overview**

In November 1998, during the **OSCE Implementation Meeting on Human Dimension Issues** in Warsaw, the official Greek delegation, in an answer to a related presentation by **Minority Rights Group - Greece**, described and explained the Roma situation in Greece with remarkable candor and accuracy:

“I wish to state in all honesty that I cannot, and will not attempt to, justify the unjustifiable. Even allowing for some degree of exaggeration in the picture painted by the NGO in its statement, we do recognize that the situation of the Roma in Greece is still far from satisfactory. It is indeed unacceptable. And in our efforts to remedy the situation we have a long way to go.”

*The Greek Government has repeatedly expressed its will to take all appropriate measures to improve the state of Roma and bring their standard of living at the same level as that of other Greek citizens. What has been hindering the efforts by the central Government is the persistent mentality of prejudice at the level of local administration and some members of the police. Of particular concern, and of course more difficult to control by the central Government, are some elected local authorities.*

Five years ago, in an effort to decentralize the program aiming at the improvement of the situation of Roma in the country, a City Municipality Network for Gypsy Citizens was created in Greece, with the participation of some 33 cities and municipalities. However, the system of allowing the local government to deal with the question has been found to be really ineffective.

Recognizing that, the Government introduced in 1996 a Program of Social Integration of Greek Gypsies, in terms of which the central Government would exercise more control over the way the program is implemented at the local level.

It is also hoped that the recently established office of Ombudsman in Greece will prove helpful, especially in fighting cases of discrimination and incidents of police brutality against Roma.

I would also add that Greece takes seriously Recommendation III, on Racism and Xenophobia against Roma and Sinti, by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance.»

Unfortunately, the above text, only reflects the sincere will -also confirmed by the **Cooperating Organizations-** of the leadership and diplomats of the –not competent on the matter- **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**, as well as the **Prime Minister’s Office**

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\* **Drom Network for Roma Social Rights, European Roma Rights Center, Greek Delegation of Doctors of the World, Greek Helsinki Monitor and Minority Rights Group-Greece**

**SEPTEMBER 1999 ACTIVITY REPORT  
OF THE GHM ROMA OFFICE**

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- 1.) Doctors of the World, DROM Network for Roma Social Rights, European Roma Rights Center, Greek Helsinki Monitor and Minority Rights Group-Greece submit a joint report to the 1999 OSCE meeting on the Roma in Greece.**
- 2.) Reactions to the OSCE report by politicians and coverage in the Greek press.**
- 3.) Racist statements by the mayor of Zefyri, Mr. Apostolos Zervas. Joint press release by the aforementioned non-governmental organizations.**
- 4.) Joint Letter to Prime Minister Simitis by the aforementioned non-governmental organizations, drawing parallels between the Athens earthquake victims and the Roma.**
- 5.) Roma earthquake victims in Gazi (Athens).**
- 6.) Roma in Argostoli (Ionian Islands).**
- 7.) Roma in Halandri (Athens).**
- 8.) Police brutality against the Roma.**
- 9.) Stateless Roma in Greece, victims of Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Code.**
- 10.) In memory of the Greek Alternate Foreign Minister, G. Kranidiotes, GHM and MRG-Greece donate 100,000 Drachmas to the Roma Associations of Chalandri and Nea Alikarnassos.**
- 11.) GHM mission to Thessaloniki (Visit to the Vice-Prefect of Thessaloniki, the Gallikos River settlement, the former military barracks of Gonou and Menemeni).**

<b>1.) Doctors of the World, DROM Network for Roma Social Rights, European Roma Rights Center, Greek Helsinki Monitor and Minority Rights Group-Greece submit a joint report to the 1999 OSCE meeting on the Roma in Greece.</b>
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*A detailed presentation of the housing, educational, human rights and health problems of the Roma tent-dwellers in Greece.*