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**INTEGRATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN  
AND THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE:  
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

**Written statement\* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples,  
a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 January 2004]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

### **EU Eastern enlargement countries: Women Rights of the Roma Minority**

After the EU's Eastern enlargement next May and in 2007 Roma will become the largest minority in the EU. At present there are seven to nine million Roma in Europe, approximately 80% of them living in the prospective new Member States. According to a World Bank study Roma in Mid- and Eastern Europe constitute one of the most disadvantaged groups in society. In the prospective EU Member States the living conditions of Roma vary from country to country. Nevertheless for members of this minority group the reality of their everyday lives is shaped by marked inequalities, deprivation and discrimination. Roma women are especially volatile in respect to gender related discrimination and violence

In Bulgaria more than anywhere else in Southern Europe determined efforts have been made to integrate Roma into society. Even so 80% are living below the poverty threshold, 70% are unemployed and those in employment earn only one third of the average wage. As a result the Roma minority live on the margins of society, their lives made even more difficult by the economic measures that Bulgaria has adopted in order to meet the criteria for EU entry. For example the number of Roma children attending school on a regular basis has fallen as a result of cuts in educational provision.

In Slovakia there are some 500,000 Roma, representing approximately 10% of the population, and they constitute the country's second largest minority after the Hungarians. The discrimination and racism suffered by Roma is particularly apparent in the educational system. The social segregation of Roma from the rest of the society is already in evidence in the elementary schools, in the spatial separation enforced for example by separate dining-rooms.

Roma frequently attend schools for students with learning difficulties or are placed in classes where the range of subjects on the syllabus is very limited, providing no assurance of a comprehensive general education. This policy also affects Roma children in their subsequent school career, impeding their access to higher education and so to employment opportunities.

One particularly worrying problem is the alleged sterilization of 150 Roma Women in Slovakia. Society for Threatened Peoples is deeply concerned that the Slovak Officials have failed to conduct adequate investigations into allegations that these women have been coercively sterilized. Without an impartial and effective official investigation there will be no justice for the victims. Roma rights organisations and international human rights organisations have namely criticized that the investigation was conducted almost exclusively in one hospital, that the investigators focused on the crime of genocide to the exclusion of other crimes related to violations of the right on health care and bodily integrity/autonomy. The investigation failed to evaluate whether consent, when given, was indeed informed. Allegedly human rights activists and possible victims were threatened with criminal charges for speaking out and some documented violations were ignored. Society for Threatened Peoples therefore appeals to the UN human rights Commission to pressure the Slovak Government into conducting an adequate investigation in correspondence with international laws and standards.

The number of Roma in Hungary is estimated at between 500,000 and 800,000, making them the country's largest minority. 40% still live below the poverty threshold and many are routinely subjected to violent assaults by skinheads and police harassment. As in the other three

prospective Member States efforts measures aimed at combating apartheid, segregation and discrimination are the subject of scorn, for example in popular television programmes that make fun of Roma customs and traditions. These degrading broadcasts portray a foreign culture that is alien to the majority of Hungarians. Roma are not integrated into society but treated as "exotic creatures", responsible for their own marginalisation. Thus the media has to be encouraged to show positive aspects and present a balanced portrayal of Roma life, refrain from stereotyping Roma people and avoid inciting tension between various ethnic groups.

There are 275,000 Roma in the Czech Republic, 2.9% of the population. Inadequate medical care and a lack of health insurance mean that Roma life expectancy is considerably below the national average. Czech men live an average of 67.3 years old while for Roma men the figure is 55.3 years. For women the difference is even more marked - 16 years. Roma are frequently denied access to employment because of their ethnic origin and consequently deprived of medical and social welfare services. Without support from outside there is no prospect in the near future of any improvement in the situation of Roma in the Czech Republic.

The Czech government has in fact tried to promote increased Roma integration in society through a variety of programmes but without having any fundamental impact on the most pressing problems such as unemployment and the lack of educational opportunities. The result has been ghettoisation and the creation of slums, worsening the situation of the Roma community.

**Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the U.N. Commission on Human Rights:**

- to intervene in the discussions relating to the accession of the states named to the EU in order to draw attention to the disquieting position of Roma in society in those countries,
- to ensure real participation by Roma people in all the decisions that affect their lives,
- to include Roma history and culture in educational texts, with particular consideration given to the experience of Roma people during the Holocaust, and to develop and implement anti-rassist curricula for schools, and anti-racism campaigns for the media,
- to make varied and sustained efforts and to implement international conventions for the protection of minorities in order to end unequal educational provision for children, police harassment and the routine discrimination in all areas of life revealed by unsatisfactory living conditions, reduced life expectancy and high levels of unemployment.

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