PRESS STATEMENT

Elimination of Racial Discrimination:
Politicians must be careful not to ignite scapegoating against Roma

Brussels, March 20th, 2009 – ERIO, the European Roma Information Office, at the eve of 21st March, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, calls on political and civil society leaders to step up their efforts in the fight against racism and prejudice that hit the 14-million people European Roma minority.

“We are receiving an increasing number of reports and news about racist attacks against the Roma community from every European Union Member State. The following months will be even more critical: with a worsening economic crisis and with European Parliament election approaching, there is the high risk that racist propaganda and hate rhetoric will easily spread among those populist politicians that use deprived and excluded minorities as scapegoats for very complex economic and societal problems”, stated Ivan Ivanov, ERIO’s Executive Director.

ERIO fully supports the statement issued today by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and other appeals made by Human Rights NGOs asking for a higher level of awareness against racial prejudice among politicians and public authorities. “We suggest that the 21st of March should also be considered the day of the fight against anti-Gypsyism”, Mr. Ivanov added.

“It must be a political priority to prevent hate speech and its extremely dangerous consequences. As it is happening in Hungary, where a young Roma man and his 5-years old son were killed and where we assist the quick rising of interethnic tension and the growth of the Hungarian Guard racist movement. But unfortunately Hungary is not an isolated case, since increasing violence against Roma and Sinti is on the rise everywhere in Europe. The anti-Gypsy rhetoric will increase the tension between majority population and Roma, this having unwanted consequences. Moreover, this violence is targeting the most deprived and excluded social groups, that are the first to suffer the consequences of the actual economic crisis”, concluded Mr. Ivanov.

Background:
On 21 March 1960, 69 Black demonstrators were killed at a peaceful protest against apartheid laws in South Africa. As a result, 21 March was declared "International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination" by the UN in 1966.

European Roma Information Office (ERIO)
Av. Edouard Lacomble 17, Brussels 1040, Brussels
Phone: +32-2733-34-62; Fax: +32-2733-38-75
office@erionet.org
www.erionet.org