



Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

Commission des Eglises auprès des Migrants en Europe

Kommission der Kirchen für Migranten in Europa

CCME 3 May 2001

CCME/CEC CONFERENCE OPENS IN BRATISLAVA

Living in Community - Towards equal opportunities and overcoming discrimination. The situation of Roma in central and eastern Europe

Fifty participants from across Europe gathered in church on Wednesday, 2 May 2001, in Bratislava for the opening worship of a conference on the situation of the Roma people in Europe. Bishop Julius Filo, President of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Slovak Republic, welcomed the participants. In his sermon, Bishop Igor Misina reminded the gathering of Jesus' teaching (Matthew 25): "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

At the Hotel Bratislava, Dr. Keith Clements, General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), opened the consultation on behalf of the two organizations, CEC and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME). He recalled the churches' involvement in issues of discrimination in the past, and the recently signed Charta Oecumenica as a commitment for all the churches, and affirmed that every person's individuality and dignity must be safeguarded.

Bishop Julius Filo again welcomed the conference to Slovakia. "Slovakia is not an island, but part of the central and eastern European region," he recalled. Therefore a conference to deal with these issues and to exchange experiences, in order to find a path of tolerance and mutual respect, was of importance.

The Vice Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, Mr. Pal Csaky, introduced the theme of the conference by presenting the situation of Roma in Slovakia. Among the priorities for action he particularly mentioned education to overcome discrimination. The Slovakian government is also involved in an intermediary programme with specific projects to alleviate unemployment among Roma, but reminded the audience that the overall unemployment rate in Slovakia was presently 18 per cent.

As a problem area Mr Csaky singled out the health situation of Roma, where he said a change in attitudes and habits is also needed.

The conference will continue on Thursday, 3 May, with presentations by Angela Kocze of the European Roma Rights Centre in Budapest and Miroslaw Zima of the Czech government commission on Roma.