

## **Press Statement**

**Helsinki, 13 March 2009**

### **Participation and equality of Roma crucial in European societies**

In a meeting of CCME members and agencies hosted by FinnChurchAid in Helsinki on 12-13 March 2009, recent developments and decisions of the EU and Council of Europe regarding Roma inclusion were appreciated as important steps. However, during recent years, the situation of the Roma people in a number of countries has deteriorated, and there has been an increase in violence against them, including killings.

Miranda Vuolasranta, Executive Director of the Finnish Roma Forum and Vice-President of European Roma and Travellers Forum of the Council of Europe, said that this is an “early warning” that a very serious conflict is arising in several countries in Europe.

The meeting in Helsinki took stock of the various political levels working on Roma inclusion in Europe as well as church initiatives, particularly in the Nordic countries. Looking at the history of slavery and recognising their own responsibility for excluding Roma from church and society remains an unfinished task for many churches. Reconciliation, overcoming bitterness and prejudice, is a difficult process on the side of majority and minority in society. Miranda Vuolasranta pointed out that churches can be important actors and can help society to apologise for failures of the past.

The meeting identified further steps for future work of churches and agencies to promote the participation of Roma as equal citizens and members of their communities.

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*CCME, the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe, is an ecumenical agency on migration and integration, asylum and refugees, and anti-racism and anti-discrimination in Europe. It works in cooperation with the Conference of European Churches and the World Council of Churches.*

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