

**Regional Conference on Addressing the Problems of Persons without Documents  
and Access to Rights**

**11-12 April 2012, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia**

**Respective participants,  
Host,  
Representatives of the international institutions,  
Representatives of the civil society,  
Ladies and gentlemen,**

**I am greeting you on behalf of the Prime Minister's Office, Office of Community Affairs. Thank you for the invitation to participate in this Conference which has a significant importance for the region and in particular for Kosovo, which participates for a first time in this kind of conference. I believe that on this occasion we will benefit from the best experiences in the region regarding the issue of persons without documents and access to rights.**

**Furthermore, I would like to congratulate you for organizing such a Conference which proves the continuity of the readiness throughout the region by ensuring our presence and provision of necessary contribution for the advancement of the Roma issue as part of the of the Roma Decade.**

**Kosovo society has set its own duty and obligation to walk along the most advanced democratic societies. Government of Kosovo is committed to ensure and guarantee the rights of communities in accordance with international standards derived from international conventions which are directly applicable in Kosovo through Kosovo Constitution and national legislation. Also, it provides for additional protection for communities and its members through a multi-layer institutional system as well as coordination mechanisms.**

**A range of institutions and offices which deal exclusively with the issue of communities are operating within the Government of Kosovo. Therefore, in addition to the Office for Community Affairs and Office for Good Governance and Equal Opportunities within the Office of the Prime Minister at central level, other mechanisms engaged directly with communities' rights are the Ministry of Communities and Returns, Returns support and coordination Unit at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Consultative Council for Communities within the President's office, the Committee on the Rights and Interests of communities in the Parliament, and Offices for Communities and Returns at municipal level.**

**Those are the mechanisms who in collaboration with civil society, various forums and international organizations, support the communities in all relevant areas by strictly following the policy of equal opportunities, social inclusion and anti-discrimination.**

**Office of Community Affairs is mandated to coordinate the efforts of the government and donors in their work with communities to ensure better strategic approach, which addresses the priorities and fulfills the gaps in policy implementation. Together with key partners, the Office of Community Affairs**

monitors legislation and policies dealing with communities and promotes the most important commitments by the government, for example, fair funding, equal employment opportunity, issues related to property rights, etc. This also includes the coordination of the efforts to ensure that government and donors are making appropriate efforts to address community needs.

The Government of Kosovo considers that the conditions under which Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities live and conduct their life in Kosovo require swift, concrete and effective policies and actions in order to ensure the successful integration of the three communities and enable their contribution to Kosovo society.

The Government of Kosovo is determined to do everything in its power to create proper conditions for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities so that they can enjoy equal rights with all other ethnic communities in Kosovo without any form of discrimination. This commitment was confirmed and concretized in 2008 through the adoption of the Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities 2009-2015, a strategy, which includes affirmative measures aimed at overall inclusion into Kosovo society.

The Action Plan on the implementation of the Strategy for the Integration of Roma Ashkali and Egyptian Communities, 2009-2015 presents the undergoing efforts to enable the establishment of the adequate political, social, and economic, educational and cultural conditions which will support these communities in creating and strengthening their identity, as well as, reinforcing the recognition and protection of their individual and community values.

The format of the Action Plan on the Implementation of the Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities, includes technical elements of public policy implementation process. In parallel, the pursued Action Plan format aimed also at eliminating the problems confronted by Roma Decade member states during the implementation of their national strategies and action plans. The Action plan includes sectoral goal and objectives, detailed activities and actions, defines responsible and supporting institutions, means of verification, and cost-estimation for each activity.

Strategy and Action Plan includes following fields:

- Education
- Employment and economic empowerment
- Health and Social issues
- Housing and informal settlements
- Return and Reintegration
- Registration and Documentation
- Anti-discrimination
- Gender issues
- Culture, media and information
- Participation and representation
- Security

Since the focus of today's conference is registration and documentation, I will further focus on the situation and the progress made in this regard.

The right to be recognized as person before the law is a fundamental human right. Civil registration is a prerequisite for access to civil, political, economic, social

and cultural rights. Civil registration recognizes a person's name, a right that the person cannot relinquish, and a right which identifies the person as integral part of the society in which he or she lives. Persons excluded from civil registration do not have their identity recognized by the legal system and are likely to be excluded from the exercise of their rights and obligations.

It should be emphasized that many difficulties are encountered during the process of registration of persons belonging to Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians communities. Often the problem relates to lack of permanent residence, births occurred outside the health institutions, sometimes parents are never registered in the register of births, marriage or death, loss of documents during displacement, etc.

In Kosovo, for various reasons, there is a potential of lack of documents among these categories:

- Kosovo residents
- Displaced person in Kosovo and in the region
- Returnees from the region
- Repatriated persons
- Person who will be repatriated to Kosovo

Therefore, the government has taken many different initiatives in order to ensure personal identity documentation for all citizens of Kosovo.

At municipal level, since 2007, more than 20 municipalities have signed Memoranda of Understanding with local NGO CRPK, which resulted in providing easier access to the registration procedures in the civil registers and waiving the fees only for these communities.

The information of citizens on civil registration is conducted through local media and by the municipal officials. Also, the ministry's website has information and data on civil registration.

Last year, the European Commission has taken the initiative and hosted together with Kosovo's Ministry of European Integration a policy dialogue conference on how to strengthen the inclusion of the RAE communities in Kosovo. The conference held in Pristina on 11 May was hosted by the Director for the Western Balkans, Mr Pierre Mirel and it involved all major international and local stakeholders who work on Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian issues. 40 concrete actions to boost the Implementation of Kosovo's Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians Strategy and Action Plan were agreed upon. These range from measures to ensure school attendance of RAE children, efforts to recruit RAE in the public sector, to stronger efforts for civil registration of these communities and land allocation for sustainable housing solutions.

Creating optimal conditions to facilitate the sustainable return and integration of repatriated persons in Kosovo, is one of the concrete actions that were taken by the approval of the Law on Repatriation and the Reintegration Strategy for Repatriated Persons.

The government's commitment and dedication is shown by the prioritization of the issues that have to do with civil registration. Civil Status Law approved last year allows the registration of citizens with high flexibility and under equal

**conditions for all communities in Kosovo. This is reflected in a separate article that allows recordings of late registrations, those outside the legal timeframe of 30 days, through statements of two witnesses. Procedures and criteria for late registration of births and deaths are defined with a specific Administrative Instruction which has been signed in February this year.**

**Finally, one of the latest initiatives, by which Kosovo government has confirmed its commitment toward integration of these three communities, is issuance of the Circular from Ministry of Internal Affairs, respectively, Civil Registration Agency, that instructs all Municipal Civil Status Offices to undertake the necessary measures to realize the rights of these three communities for late registration of births and deaths, by removing the fines for a period of one year (from March 2012 until March 2013). This is especially important since in line with the Law, the applicable fees vary from 20-50 euro for late registration of births and 50-100 euro for late registration of deaths. For taking such a decision, the recommendations of the Zagreb Declaration were taken into consideration, the recommendations which resulted from the Conference on the Provision of Civil Status Documentation and Registration in South East Europe held in Zagreb in October 2011 the participating states have agreed to remove the fines for registration of births and deaths for the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.**

**Therefore, such an example can be taken as positive practice for the various initiatives at regional level.**

**Alongside all these activities and commitments but also achievements, we as a government can not be satisfied, but our joint work and commitment will be a motivation to move forward the processes and thereafter to become part of the Decade of Roma, for which our office has drafted a strategy which we expect to be signed and applied. Of course, we need all your support.**

**Therefore, I would like to thank you on behalf of the Kosovo Government for offering us the opportunity to express the work, achievements in addressing the documentation issues for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.**

**THANK YOU!**