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Honorable Audience, Dear Members of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Dear colleagues,

I am honoured to participate at this meeting and to share with you Romani CRISS views regarding the equal access of Roma to housing in Romania, looking at the role of the Romanian institutions and civil society in ensuring these rights.

By its very mandate, as organization that militates for the defense and promotion of human rights, Romani CRISS has documented and intervened in cases of discrimination and abuse in the field of housing, but it also contributed to the development of policies, good practices in this area.

There are several aspects that we should consider while discussing about housing rights in Romania.

1. One important issue related to housing rights is the **lack of property documents** for the houses Roma live in, which happens for several reasons:

- when they bought the houses, they didn't sign selling-buying contracts, they received only hand receipts that are not accepted as property documents, thus, they cannot obtain permanent domicile because the taxes for the house are still paid on somebody else's name.
- the successive selling of the houses based on hand receipt, while the real owner cannot be traced anymore

2. Due to legislative changes after 1990, it appeared also the **evictions** problem from the houses allocated from the place of work, evictions from the houses claimed by the former owner, (as per Law 112/1995) and eviction of Roma families from the social houses they lived in

3. Nevertheless, we would also like to stress the fact that in Romania exist **certain patterns of discrimination or abuse** on housing and living conditions of Roma population.

Romani CRISS has been indignant with the policy of local public authorities to evict and segregate Roma from the cities to the "margins of society". This concern is manifested in the context of more cases and situations documented at local level in several areas of the country.

Until the present, the governmental authorities do not have any action instrument that would "correct" the decisions adopted by Local Councils regarding the demolition of

Roma's peripheral houses or the Roma's eviction from the neighborhoods of the cities they live in.

I would like to mention only one case, in May 2004, when 140 Roma persons have been evicted from a building located in the centre of Miercurea Ciuc locality and have been settled by the City hall at the outskirts of the town, in the very neighbourhood of the filtering station, in very precarious living conditions. Although the Prefect admitted publicly that this act was illegal, and although Romani CRISS complained to the National Council for Combating Discrimination, so far so remedy has been applied.

In such cases, the most affected categories of population are the children (children end up living in inhuman conditions, although they are the ones supposed to enjoy a special attention and protection from the State), women and older people, without any defense tools against such situations.

To conclude I would like to mention that although Romanian Government ensured at maximum a formal type of equality for Roma (through legislation, strategies, programs and commitments), de facto situation is dramatically different and the representatives of the state authorities at local level are not always aware about the existence of these policies, or no dot always respect them.

We should admit that in Romania it still exist a widespread racism within the local administrations and there is a need for a strong back-up from the political elite in Romania, to support Roma civil society actions to stop these systematic practices.

As international human rights bodies (ECRI) also recommended to Romanian authorities, is necessary to take steps to ensure that members of the Roma community have access to decent housing. On the other hand is extremely important to impose penalties on local government officials who engage in discriminatory practices against Roma, amongst others, the area of housing.

Thank you