

Statement for CEC Assembly Trondheim Hearing 27 June 2003:

Healing of Memories - an ongoing task - Roma and the Nordic Churches

In the struggle against racism and xenophobia in Europe, the question of the treatment of Roma is of utmost importance. Reports by international monitoring institutions such as the EU Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia or the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance have outlined that Roma are among those groups most affected by racism, xenophobia, discrimination and all forms of social and cultural exclusion. Roma are a minority in almost every European country.

A number of churches have over the last years become aware of the issue of the exclusion of and discrimination against Roma. They have increasingly recognised their active role in the marginalisation, exclusion and oppression of Roma - through their preaching, actions and partly their theology. This recognition proved to be a painful process, often accompanied with accusations that the churches were only half-heartedly committed to the issue. Other churches are still less willing to address the issue. The honest analysis of the churches contribution in the racist exclusion of Roma, the asking for forgiveness and the beginning of a process of healing of memories thus seems of crucial importance for all churches in Europe.

In the late 90ies, the Nordic churches have been particularly active in this process, Churches issued statements of asking for forgiveness and engaged in diaconal and human rights work related to Roma issues. On various occasions, events were organised in cooperation with Roma organisations. Roma organisations from their side have tried to respond to the developments in the churches and an interesting process has developed. Yet statements from inside the Nordic churches show that many church members believe that reconciliation and healing of memories still has a long way to go.

At the hearing on **Healing of Memories - an ongoing task - Roma and the Nordic Churches** on 27 June 2003, Roma from Finland, Norway and Sweden give an account of their view with regard to the reconciliation processes. Many of them have been part of these processes for many years. These processes are not easy, for neither side; indeed they are demanding patience, tolerance and respect. Memories of the past, of wounds, and uncovering prejudice are important to being able to live together, to overcoming barriers, indeed for healing inflicted wounds.

We therefore wish to recommend to the Assembly of the Conference of European Churches to take decisions for CEC and its member churches,

To assist and facilitate processes of healing memories by encouraging research and encounter;

To encourage the churches to fully acknowledge their role in the marginalisation and suppression of Roma, and to ask for forgiveness;

To tackle prejudice and combat segregation, still a common phenomenon in many European societies in the fields of education, health, housing and social welfare;

To facilitate participation of Roma representatives in relevant working groups or task forces on human rights including social rights;

To undertake an ecumenical team visit to countries and churches in Central and Eastern Europe to look into the situation of Roma minorities, churches' responses and relevant projects and processes.

To announce a campaign of the " Integration Of Roma" in the European Churches.

To encourage Theological Institute or decision making bodies in CEC or CCME to have a special seat for Roma.

We sincerely hope that with such activities, we can contribute to the biblical calling "that they may be one".

Sincerely,

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