

# ERRC Roma Rights Summer Workshop 2008

Larry Oloomofe<sup>1</sup>

FOR the first time since 2005, the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), assisted with funding from The Sigrid Rausing Trust, held its in-house training and capacitation Roma Rights Summer Workshop, for Romani activists and students in the sphere of Roma rights advocacy. The 10 day workshop was held from 4 – 14 July 2008 in Budapest, Hungary, and was attended by 17 participants from Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. The diverse background of the participants was an important factor in providing a vast pool of experiences of what Romani people encounter in different regional as well as national contexts. This allowed for a wide range of comparison and similarity of experience amongst the participants, and was particularly unique to this year's workshop.

The workshop addressed the fundamental distinctions in terms of approaches to Roma rights advocacy and activism, focusing participants attention on the major differences between the "rights based" and the "needs based" approaches to advocacy. Throughout the duration of the workshop, the participants had to grapple with the concept of *effective* advocacy and how to ensure that their actions would have a longer lasting impact for the people and interests that they were supposed to be representing. It is widely believed by acolytes of the aforementioned rights based approach that this method has been more effective in addressing the numerous cases of violations that Romani communities have faced across the region.<sup>2</sup>

The workshop organisers employed a group-work based methodology (groups of 2, 4 and 19)

wherein participants were divided into individual groups and handed a number of worksheets, then guided by facilitators to discuss topics amongst themselves. This allowed the topics to be examined in greater detail and provided the participants with the opportunity to acquire a more nuanced understanding of the rights based approach and how Romani issues fit within this paradigm.

The primary purpose of the workshop was to develop the capacity of a new generation of Romani leaders and human rights activists, to use domestic, regional and international human rights instruments and mechanisms to advance the rights of Romani communities across the Central and Eastern Europe region, both domestically and internationally.

The main objectives of the Summer Workshop were to enable participants to:

- Analyse issues and situations affecting Roma in their respective countries based on internationally accepted human rights values and principles;
- Develop skills in using domestic mechanisms (such as national legislation) and international human rights instruments (i.e., United Nations Treaties, the European Convention on Human Rights, etc.) to protect and promote the rights of Roma;
- Strengthen skills in monitoring and reporting human rights violations and racial discrimination as well as advocacy skills;
- Examine the phenomena of hate crimes and hate incidents in both the local domestic and European settings;

<sup>1</sup> Larry Oloomofe is ERRC Human Rights Trainer.

<sup>2</sup> This is based upon an acceptance that all human beings have rights and it is therefore absolutely unacceptable that any of these rights are abrogated by any person or state institution such as the police, education or housing authorities or private individuals, etc.

- Increase their capacity to apply their learning within their organisations and their societies; and
- Explore opportunities for networking and developing partnerships with NGOs and government officials to further advance the cause of Roma rights throughout Europe.

In order to achieve these objectives, the ERRC human rights trainer devised an integrative training manual for use by the participants throughout the duration of the workshop. The manual (alongside the input from facilitators) ensured that the participants were fully engaged in all the exercises since they had to complete the tasks themselves. The workshop also incorporated a number of presentations by external experts such as Ms Madi Sharma from the European Union's European Economic & Social Committee, Mr Timothy Jones, a British barrister who works extensively with the European Convention on Human Rights, and Mr Michael Simmons, an African-American human rights activist and consultant based in Budapest. The method of combining presentations from experts and the integrative approach allowed for greater focus by the participants on the various topics that were covered during the training and was a significant improvement on previous editions of the summer workshop.

The training programme was planned in such a way that each activity complemented the next. Therefore, each day's activity was the basis for the following day's activity thereby allowing for an incremental

development of material and knowledge by the participants. This was especially so in the case of the sessions devoted to presentational skills, for example, Effective Debating and the Moot Court.

### Effective debating skills

This was a full day session on the fundamentals of effective debating focusing on the skills involved in (formal) debating. The rationale underpinning this particular segment of the training workshop was that by providing information on the various techniques involved in debating, participants would have a more confident attitude and approach to advocacy work that they may conduct in the future. The organisers hoped that the participants could transpose the skills involved in debating (researching the topic, organising the material, preparation of evidence and effective arguments, constructing a lucid, coherent argument, concise presentation of the facts, etc.) to their own spheres of activity at home. In learning these skills, the participants would be able to subsequently present a dispassionate, objective case/argument in various arenas and fora (courts, tribunals, parliamentary and other committees, etc) thereby becoming more effective in their advocacy work.

### Moot court

This was a full day session that entailed a detailed examination of the European Convention on Human Rights, followed by a moot court (role play) session by the participants.

#### Participants of the ERRC Summer Workshop 2008

- Gabriela-Ionela Danciu, Romania
- Mihai Bica, Romania
- Gheorghe Ispas, Romania
- Oana Mihalache, Romania
- Irfan Martez, Macedonia
- Sabina Idrizi, Macedonia
- Kjani Musstafowski, Macedonia
- Maryana Borisova, Bulgaria
- Naomi Taylor, UK
- Fedor Kondur, Ukraine
- Iuire Caldarari, Moldova
- Victorina Luca, Moldova
- Mimoza Gavrani, Kosovo
- Kadrije Krasniqi, Kosovo
- Elisabetta Vivaldi, Italy
- Dinók Henriett, Hungary
- Orsós Anna, Hungary
- Juliana Sullam, USA
- Sybil Lee, UK

The moot court session involved a case study for which the participants were split into two legal teams to present their case in front of the European Court of Human Rights. One team represented the victim(s) of the supposed human rights violations and the other team represented the national government that was blamed for the violations in the first place. This session drew on participants' debating skills picked up the day before and was a very useful experience for all involved.

During the workshop, the participants were also provided with an introduction to the European (European Union and Council of Europe) and broader international (United Nations) legal framework and were presented with in-depth information on the complex processes each of these spheres of international law entailed. In particular, participants examined the following legal instruments:

- Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM);
- European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR);
- European Union Race Equality Directive (RED);
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR);
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD);

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC);
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); and
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

Within the parameters of these international [legal] instruments, the participants conducted a number of group activities and discussions aimed at discerning how relevant the processes intrinsic to international law were to the respective Romani issues and communities back in their home countries. There was a useful discussion on the twin issues of women's rights and cultural rights in which the participants expressed their strongly held opinions on the issues. The main issue that generated sometimes passionate responses was that of cultural identities and practices within Romani communities and whether some practices were recidivist or not and if so, whether they violated any rights of some of the members of a given community.

The workshop ended with an extensive evaluation session in which follow up initiatives were presented and discussed by each participant along with the intention to continue future collaborative work amongst each other.