

## D.H. and Others Tabled for Discussion One Year on

ON 12-13 NOVEMBER 2008, the ERRC, in cooperation with the Roma Education Fund, the Open Society Fund Czech Republic, and the Coalition of NGOS “Together to Schools” organised a conference to mark the first anniversary of the European Court of Human Rights landmark decision in *D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic*. In that case, the Court found that the tracking of Romani children into schools intended for children with mild disabilities constituted illegal discrimination.

The conference, entitled “Education without Barriers,” brought together Romani activists, human rights advocates, education specialists and government officials to reflect on the case and on the present status of education for Romani children in the Czech Republic. The conference closed with an address from the Minister of Education, Mr Ondřej Liška.

The ERRC and the Roma Education Fund presented the results of new research that suggested that, one year after *D.H.* very little



*From left to right, Ms Edita Stejskalová (Zvule Práva), Mr Ondřej Liška (Czech Minister of Education), Mr Robert A. Kushen (ERRC), Mr James A. Goldston (Open Society Justice Initiative) and Mr Romyan Russinov (Roma Education Fund) respond to questions from journalists at a press event following the close of the conference.*

PHOTO: ERRC

had changed: Romani children were still being tracked into schools intended for children with mild disabilities (reabeled “practical” schools) and offered a substandard curriculum. Among other recommendations, the report called for the abolition of these practical schools and the mainstreaming of the students into standard schools with full curricula. This recommendation proved to be one of the controversial subjects during the course of the conference, with some education experts dismissing the call as impractical and some Roma activists expressing concern that, were the schools to be closed, the students would not find any other school to accept them.

Ministry of Education officials acknowledged many shortcomings in its approach to educating Romani children, and they pledged additional legislative reform in an effort to address continuing discrimination. However, the Government sidestepped the issue of abolishing the practical schools or declaring a moratorium on new admissions. In private meetings with these officials, the ERRC pledged its support in helping shape new legislation. However, it is not clear what the Government will be able to accomplish given that the reform-minded minister will likely be in office only another year.

Further information can be found at: *<http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=2986>*.