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President of Ukraine  
Viktor Fedorovich Yanukovich.

Human Rights Ombudsman  
Valeriya Vladimirovna Lutkovskaya

Secretary of Yalta City Council  
Sergei Fedorovich Ilash

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) is an international public interest law organisation, working to combat anti-Romani racism through strategic litigation, monitoring, human rights education, research and advocacy.<sup>1</sup> The ERRC has consultative status with the Council of Europe and the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. International Charitable Organization “Roma Women Fund Chiricli” is an international organization, working to address problems of Roma minority in Ukraine.

The ERRC and Chiricli monitor open statements by public officials in the media and other public spheres which concern the Roma minority and touch upon their image and their situation in the respective country.

Media reports that on 23 May 2013 Sergei Ilash, who currently serves as a Secretary of Yalta City Council and is now running an election campaign to become a mayor of Yalta, was addressing representatives of the Yalta military and stated that “all Roma women who are fortune-tellers and do not have passports should be either detained or evicted from the city and no one is going to cry over them...” Following that statement Mr Ilash made a very offensive remark, equating Roma and homeless people with animals.<sup>2</sup>

The ERRC and Chiricli are deeply concerned by these statements and urge Mr Ilash to refrain from using them in future. Apart from the general offensive character of this statement, it is also manifestly discriminatory. All the international human rights treaties that Ukraine has ratified contain provisions banning discrimination and obliging Ukrainian Government to safeguard equality and provide protection from discrimination, and these international treaties represent an integral part of national legal order.<sup>3</sup> Articles 21 and 24 of the Constitution of Ukraine provide that everyone has equal status, irrespective of racial and ethnic origin, language, age, gender, etc.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.errc.org>

<sup>2</sup> [http://lenta.ru/news/2013/05/24/crimea/?utm\\_source=dlvr.it&utm\\_medium=twitter](http://lenta.ru/news/2013/05/24/crimea/?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter)

<sup>3</sup> Article 9 of the Constitution of Ukraine,

<http://www.codex.in.ua/doc?id=1QFGC7lnfp8OMFlvS2AereQ1bakbkxD2oJ36SVd51QA>

Article 28 guarantees that everyone has the right to dignity and respect of his or her personality.<sup>4</sup>

It is even more disappointing and surprising that such a statement from public official came after President of Ukraine, on 8 April 2013, signed the Strategy on Roma Inclusion and the Ukrainian Government is currently elaborating its Action Plan based on this Strategy. Underlying principles laid down in the Strategy are those of equality and non-discrimination. It is acknowledged in the Strategy itself that in order to properly address the wide range of problems Roma people are currently facing in Ukrainian society, it is first necessary to deal with social exclusion as one of the root causes of their difficult situation.<sup>5</sup> Any statement such as the one made by Mr Ilash represents a clear example of something that increases the perceived social gap between Roma and non-Roma instead of bridging it.

Public officials should refrain from statements which have the potential to ignite social unrest and create tensions in a multiethnic society. Furthermore, public officials as representatives of the state should not only refrain from certain actions bearing negative connotations for democratic values and principles, but should endorse and promote the ones that are the cornerstone of the equal and free societies, where non-discrimination and equality undoubtedly comprise the essence of the democracy.

The ERRC and Chiricli urge Mr Ilash and all public officials of Ukraine to refrain from using statements that undermine principles of equality and non-discrimination, create negative image and negative implications for the peaceful existence of the Roma minority in Ukraine.

Yours sincerely,

Dezideriu Gergely  
ERRC Executive Director

Zemfira Kondur  
Chiricli Vice-President

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Articles 21, 24 and 28

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.president.gov.ua/documents/15628.html>