



HAUT-COMMISSARIAT AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME • OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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REFERENCE:

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Dear Messrs. Kocáb and Walek,

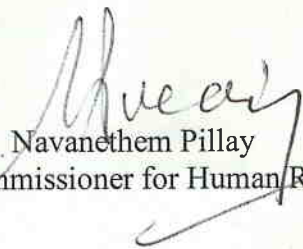
Thank you for your letter of 20 September 2013, informing my Office about the Gypsy Spirit Awards. I recall my meeting with Mr. Kocáb in Geneva in March 2010 and our fruitful discussion regarding the situation of the Roma in the Czech Republic.

Indeed, it is very symbolic that the Awards will take place on International Human Rights Day, thus re-emphasising that the protection of the rights of minorities, including the Roma, is an inalienable part of the protection of human rights worldwide. It is unfortunate that despite efforts by national, regional and international stakeholders, the Roma continue to face systematic human rights violations in many countries in areas of governance and access to, inter alia, housing, education and healthcare, and often become victims of xenophobia and racially-motivated verbal and physical attacks. I am deeply concerned with regard to the human rights situation of the Roma, and my Office has dedicated one of the thematic pages of OHCHR's website to this specific issue. I would like to seize this opportunity to assure you that my Office – both at headquarters and in the field – will continue to work on the promotion and protection of the human rights of the Roma.

While I would be honoured to provide my auspices over the Gypsy Spirit Awards, I have to inform you that our rules and regulations do not envisage providing such auspices over any event that has not been initiated and conducted by OHCHR. However, given the importance of this event, I am hereby sending a message of support for the Gypsy Spirit Awards, which is attached to this letter.

I wish you the best of luck with your excellent initiative.

Yours sincerely,



Navanethem Pillay

High Commissioner for Human Rights

Mr. Michael Kocáb
Michael Kocáb Foundation, Czech Republic
Czech Republic

Mr. Czeslaw Walek
Otvřená společnost, p.b.o., Czech Republic



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Message of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the occasion of Gypsy Spirit Award ceremony

10th of December 2013
Prague, Czech Republic

Promoting and protecting human rights, including those of minorities, lies at the heart of the work that the United Nations carries out worldwide. It is an essential pillar supporting progress towards freedom, peace, development and justice.

But as much as relevant international mechanisms and instruments, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, are an indispensable element in achieving this overarching goal, it is the work of people and organizations on the ground that serves as the principal catalyst in making the rights of minority communities a reality. This work deserves our full recognition and support.

The Roma are a minority that continues to face particularly serious and widespread human rights violations in housing, health, education, employment and many other fields. Stepping up our work on Roma issues is therefore crucial. It is equally crucial that we learn lessons from numerous initiatives that have consumed resources without yielding concrete improvements in the life of Roma, often due to the lack of true inclusion of Roma in their planning and implementation. At the same time, we must share, celebrate and replicate those initiatives that have had a true positive impact.

It therefore gives me great pleasure to welcome and commend the Gypsy Spirit Award initiative, which recognizes innovative projects that positively contribute to the life of the Roma community in the Czech Republic. The everyday efforts of human rights defenders and others who contribute to the integration and combat the persistent discrimination and marginalization of the Roma are an inspiration to us all. These concrete examples give us hope that together we can finally ensure the full enjoyment of rights by the Roma across Europe and around the world.