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## Churches called to stand in solidarity with the Roma minority in Europe

### Public Statement 21 July 2009

*According to Art. 1 I of its Constitution one of the tasks of CEC is to issue public statements, which can, in accordance with Art. 5 III No. 5 be adopted directly by the Assembly. Having realized that despite the ongoing integration with CCME, it was not possible to address ethnic minority issues sufficiently, the Steering Committee has set up a CCME working group in accordance with SO 7.14 to address an issue at the heart of the work of that Commission. It has been submitted to them according to SO 8.3. The Steering Committee submits it to the Assembly with the recommendation to adopt it as a public statement of the Conference of European Churches*

The 13<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Conference of European Churches expresses its dismay and deep concern that the situation of the Roma, Sinti and travellers' communities have not improved in the last years and programmes for Roma integration especially in Central-East Europe are not pursued sufficiently.

The social exclusion of the largest European ethnic minority is severely exacerbated by increasing racist violence in the past years.

The Assembly commends those churches which have provided shelter and stood at the side of the victims of such attacks. The Assembly affirms the Christian conviction that every person is created in the image of God; the dignity of every person needs to be upheld.

We also regret that churches have not yet achieved sufficient inclusion of these groups in parishes and churches, which is also exemplified by the fact that there is no Roma, Sinti or traveller delegate at our Assembly.

The Assembly urges the European institutions and the CEC member churches to introduce effective integration strategies and viable steps and actions for the integration and social inclusion of Roma, Sinti and travellers' communities.

The Assembly calls on governments across Europe

- To uphold and protect the rights of ethnic minorities and vigorously work against racism and racist violence.
- To intensify the work for Roma inclusion in European societies in the framework of the Council of Europe and the EU decade for Roma Inclusion launched in 2008.
- To initiate programmes underpinned with the necessary financial resources in the field of education to provide a form of education that meets the needs of the Roma.
- To protect and promote the cultural heritage and dialects of Roma, Sinti and travellers.

- To realise a comprehensive social and employment system which recognises the Roma's right to work without any discrimination.

The Assembly of CEC calls on churches across Europe

- To denounce racism and racist violence as a sin.
- To stand at the side of victims of racist violence and advocate for bringing the perpetrators of racist violence before a court of justice.
- To cooperate with the national authorities in the framework of the Council of Europe work with Roma, Sinti and Travellers and the EU Decade for Roma inclusion.
- To work with representatives of the Roma minorities in European countries in the processes of healing of memories, to recognise the history of slavery and exclusion, and to identify steps and processes for living together while respecting traditions and cultures.

The CEC Assembly expresses its respect for the Roma minority in Europe.