



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
High Commissioner on National Minorities**

Address by

**Lamberto Zannier
Chair of the 2020 Max van der Stoel Award Jury
Former OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (2017-2020)**

to the

2020 Max van der Stoel Award Ceremony

[Check against delivery]

The Hague, The Netherlands, 19 November 2021

Dear Minister,

Dear High Commissioner,

Dear Laureates and Fellow Jury Members,

Dear family members and friends of the late Max van der Stoel,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here on behalf of the international jury of the 2020 Max van der Stoel Award as we honour the Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre from Ireland in recognition of its continued efforts to strengthen the genuine integration of Ireland's society by advocating and protecting the rights of the Traveller and Roma communities.

I would like to start with a quote from the founding father of the office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Max van der Stoel, from a speech that he made roughly 22 years ago, in 1999:

“The plight of the Roma is something that we should all be concerned with, not only in the context of the protection of persons belonging to national minorities or the human dimension, but because it is a matter that affects us all as Europeans.”¹

Max van der Stoel advocated for long-term solutions by emphasizing that, and I quote him here again: “Majority communities must learn to accept the right of persons belonging to a minority such as the Roma to maintain their own cultural identity and ways of life, and majority communities may eventually see how such diversity is in fact a source of enrichment for society. Roma for their part must manifest their interest in equal participation in society by showing civic responsibility and taking an active role in addressing community problems.”²

I believe it is safe to say that similar reflections can be made when it comes to the

¹ Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Roma and Sinti Issues held in Vienna on 6 September 1999.

² Human Dimension Seminar on Roma in the CSCE Region held in Warsaw, Poland on 20 September 1994.

Traveller community as well.

Indeed, since its foundation in 1985, the Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre has recognized the need for solidarity between Roma and Irish Traveller communities based on their shared experience of racism and social exclusion. Pavee Point's mission is to improve the quality of life, living circumstances, status and participation of Travellers and Roma. It does this by working innovatively for social justice, greater solidarity, development, equality and human rights, which is precisely the spirit of engagement that Max van der Stoep encouraged to foster social cohesion in the OSCE region.

As has been the case over the past years, the jury had a difficult choice to make as we considered many excellent nominations. However, Pavee Point, with its unique grass roots efforts, systemic work, and carefully tailored approach which is sensitive to the needs of their community, stood out among the nominees, gaining a unanimous vote. This non-governmental organization has demonstrated, and continues to demonstrate, great determination and perseverance in supporting the integration of Ireland's diverse society. For over thirty years, Pavee Point has pioneered innovative and groundbreaking work using a collective community development approach to address issues and promote the rights of the Roma and Travellers in Ireland. This organization, consisting of Travellers, Roma, and members of the majority population, works together at the local, regional, and national level to ensure that Travellers and Roma have a voice and are included in decision-making processes. Working on the premise "nothing about us without us" means that Roma and Travellers can decide the future for their own communities.

By carrying out initiatives on education and healthcare, Pavee Point also work to combat violence against women and support participation in programmes that bridge economic and societal inequalities. Equally important is Pavee Point's awareness-raising efforts within the broader society, as they work towards eradicating negative stereotypes and discrimination against Roma and Traveller communities, including against women and children. In 2017, their lobbying efforts to achieve change that

would improve equality led to the Republic of Ireland extending official legal recognition for Travellers as a minority ethnic group. This is truly inspirational.

But the story of Pavee Point does not end there. Over the last 20 or so months, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on already vulnerable communities throughout the OSCE area. During this time, Pavee Point took on a number of new initiatives, including co-operating with the national authorities to mitigate the negative implications of the pandemic for the Roma and Traveller communities.

I started this speech with some words by Max van der Stoep. I would now like to close with some words by the founding member and first director of Pavee Point, John O'Connell:

“Open up our minds, and more importantly our imaginations, take another look at the notion of nomadism in the lives of Travellers, and see it not as an aberration, but as a fulfilling and humane form of existence.”

I hope that Pavee Point will continue to open up minds and enable others to understand and live side-by-side with the Roma and Traveller communities.

With these words, I wish, on behalf of the jury, to congratulate Anastasia Crickley and Martin Collins, and everyone at Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, for their ongoing efforts to improve the situation of Irish Travellers and Roma.