

## **PERMANENT MISSION OF MONTENEGRO TO THE UN, WTO AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

November 22, 2013 – **Forum on Minority Issues – “Beyond freedom of religion or belief: guaranteeing the rights of religious minorities”**

Statement by Zorica Maric Djordjevic, Special Representative - Ambassador of Montenegro to the HRC

Thank you Madam Chair,

I would like to thank the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Chairperson of the Forum on Minority Issues, the Independent Expert on minority issues and for their informative statements.

Montenegro is very supportive of the promotion and protection of minority issues and of guaranteeing the rights of religious minorities free of violence and discrimination. We believe that promoting minority rights contributes to the political and social stability of states and that it is important to ensure that the voices of minority groups are heard.

Montenegro is composed of a multicultural society and is dedicated to improving the protections of minority rights. My government has striven to protect minority rights through various means. The Constitution of Montenegro specifically states that minority groups shall be guaranteed specific rights and liberties. Montenegro has also ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and the European Charter for Regional Minority Languages. Additionally, Montenegro established a Strategy guaranteeing protection of minorities, focusing on education, culture, access to information and use of minority languages and in 2012 has introduced a Strategy to improve the status of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

The main goal of this Strategy is to improve and advance the position of these particular minorities and religious groups that moved to Montenegro during the Kosovo crises in 1999. Like all other citizens they are granted full access to free education and free health insurance. Through the projects of regional cooperation we are focus on providing permanent housing for Roma families and additional micro financing in support of their job opportunities.

Ministry of the Interior and the UNHCR recently published a brochure titled, “Enroll a Newborn in Four Easy Steps,” as a guide for parents, in both Albanian and Roma languages. It contains information on enrolling a child in the birth and citizens registries, how to obtain a health card, and the financial support that parents are eligible for. These brochures will be available on the websites of the Ministry of the Interior, the local NGO “Parents,” and the UNHCR.

The Constitution of Montenegro clearly stipulates that religious communities shall be equal and free in the exercise of religious rights and religious affairs. The law in Montenegro also prohibits discrimination, including discrimination based on religion. Additionally, the government recently signed a number of agreements with religious communities with the intent to further ensure freedom of religion.

We recognize that we will continue to face challenges in some of these areas due to socio-economic conditions, as well as financial limitations in funding the preservation of heritage cultural identities. Thus, my Government fully supports the cooperation with the UN system and will continue its commitment and its efforts to promoting minority and religious rights in the years to come.

Thank you.