Roma and Racism:
International Responses to a Civil Rights Struggle in Europe

with

Erika Schlager
Counsel for International Law, US Helsinki Commission

Susan Ball
OSCE Coordinator, Deputy Director Office of European Political and Security Affairs, Department of State (TBC)

Zeljko Jovanovic
Director of Roma Initiatives, Open Society Foundations

Moderated by

Joelle Fiss, Senior Associate, Fighting Discrimination Program, Human Rights First

Chaired by

Michelle Kelso, Assistant Professor of Sociology and International Affairs, GWU

The economic crisis in Europe has given rise to an increase of nationalism and intolerance in many countries, including xenophobic violence against refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and others seen as outsiders. The Roma—Europe’s largest ethnic minority—have been particularly affected. Perceived by society as second-class citizens, Roma face disproportionate rates of harassment as well as institutional discrimination in education, health, housing, and employment, which directly affect their high rates of unemployment and poverty.

Roma are easy targets for a range of societal ills, as illustrated by the recent controversy surrounding the cover story in a Swiss magazine entitled “The Roma Are Coming.” The magazine’s misuse of a three-year-old photo of a Roma boy holding a toy gun generated a storm online. While the efforts of European governments and multilateral institutions like the World Bank and the European Union have provided some impetus for change, only a fraction of Roma have benefited. Quality of life for most, measured by any economic indicator, has actually deteriorated. Why have international efforts so far failed to improve the lives of Roma across the continent? What national and international mechanisms are most successful in promoting the human rights of Roma? What does the crisis of the European Union mean for the socially excluded? Where can the U.S. play an important role?

Thursday, May 3, 2012
9:30-11:30 am
Lindner Family Commons
1957 E Street NW, Room 602

Please RSVP at http://tinyurl.com/RomaGWU

This event is co-sponsored by Human Rights First, the National Democratic Institute, the National Endowment for Democracy, and the Open Society Foundations.