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Mr. F. Backhuijs
Mayor of Nieuwegein
P.O. Box 1
3440 AA Nieuwegein
Netherlands

To the Mayor of the Nieuwegein Municipality

Brussels, 24 October 2011

Dear Mr. Backhuijs,

The European Roma Information Office (ERIO) is an international advocacy organisation fighting racist discrimination against Roma. It promotes political and public discussion on Roma issues by providing factual and in-depth information on a range of policy issues to the European Union institutions, Roma civil organisations, governmental authorities and intergovernmental bodies.

We are writing to you in relation to the project 'Wisselgeld', developed for the municipality of Nieuwegein (Utrecht, Netherlands) taking place from January 2009 until December 2011. Although the target group is Roma families with children living in Nieuwegein, the project approach fails to create a genuine dialogue with Roma communities in this location. The channel of communication between the municipal administration and Roma representatives from this community is nonexistent. The project fails to involve the Roma people from Nieuwegein in stages of policy development relating to the project.

We ask you to consult and involve Roma representatives by improving the communication channel and by promoting a genuine dialogue between the municipal administration and official representatives of the Roma community on policy issues relating to the 'Wisselgeld' project. Specifically, we ask that you commit to implement the *10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion*, particularly principles 1 and 10. This is because:

- **Policies and projects aiming at the inclusion of Roma people should be constructive, pragmatic and non-discriminatory, based on the actual situation of the Roma**

(Principle 1). To achieve this, Roma people should be involved in the design, implementation or evaluation of projects and policies.

- **The effectiveness of projects and policies is improved when Roma people actively participate in and are consulted at every stage of the process (Principle 10).** The lack of a bottom-up approach and a vertical cooperation with Roma grass roots in the 'Wisselgeld' project has been greatly criticised by the Municipality Council as well as by the Roma community and organisations. Roma communities in Nieuwegein are disappointed for not being consulted by local authorities on important issues.
- **Lack of appropriate and genuine consultation and cooperation with Roma people themselves might generate negative repercussions and backfire.** It is crucial that consultations concern a broad range of voices representing different interests and identities within Roma communities, including children and women.

We hope that we can count on your support to make the necessary amendments to the Nieuwegein Pilot before it is unrolled all over the ten municipalities with significant Roma communities.

Yours sincerely,



Ivan Ivanov
Executive Director
ERIO

Cc:

Ms Mercedes Bresso, President of Committee of Regions
Mr Aurel Ciobanu-Dordea, Director for Equality, European Commission (DG Justice)
Ms Axelle Cheney, Policy Officer of European Commission (DG Justice)
Ms Ilona Negro, Policy Officer of European Commission (DG Justice)
Mr Jeroen Schokkenbroek, Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues of the Council of Europe
Mr Michael Guet, Secretary of the Council of Europe (CAHROM)
Members of the Town Council of the Municipality of Nieuwegein
Ms Magda Jablonski, Secretary of Association of Dutch Municipalities VNG / Platform Roma Municipalities
Ms Judith Hopster, Director of the Netherlands Institute for Sinti and Roma (NISR)
Mr. R. den Uyl, Director of Radar Advies