

Dignity March Letter of Support

The dignity march is a great way to show pride as the Roma community. Roma should be celebrated for their unique cultural history and at the same time embraced as equal and full members of Romanian society. It is important for all Romanians to value Roma traditions, and to realize that this is a multiethnic country. All minorities, including the Roma, are important parts of modern Romanian culture.

The census that begins next year should be a moment to show pride in your Roma heritage. The 2002 census is widely believed to have underrepresented the number of Roma living in Romania. When the census takers come next year, I hope that all Roma proudly claim their heritage and be counted correctly.

I hope that the spirit of pride from today's events will linger and encourage you to speak out when you hear someone make disparaging remarks against Roma. We need to be vigilant and disciplined about such derogatory comments in every day conversations, and strive to say in a friendly way, "excuse me, but that's not right." When discriminatory comments become socially unacceptable, that's a sign that you're making progress in interethnic relations.

For all the participants today, I encourage you to be proud of your heritage and to be proud of your Roma friends. Teach tolerance to your children and when you hear discrimination around you, speak out against it to create a more tolerant country. Slowly but surely, Romania can become a welcoming home for all its minorities.

As Ambassador to the country with Europe's largest Roma population and as your friend, I commend your enthusiasm, hard work, and perseverance in preparing this event and in striving for a more tolerant Romania.

Ambassador Mark H. Gitenstein