

Ambassador Reeker speech

- President Crvenkovski, Ministers Stojanovski and Mustafa, FOSIM colleagues, Roma NGO partners, teachers, parents, and – of course – the Roma Education Program's high school graduates, Good afternoon to all of you.
- I am very happy to be here today to acknowledge the successes of USAID's Roma Education Project, which started in 2004 and will continue through 2011. I am especially happy that after four years of implementation, we are here today to celebrate together one of the program's major accomplishments – the graduation of 198 high school students, who were recipients of scholarships and academic support through the program.
- Since 1993, the American people, through USAID, have invested nearly \$500 million in projects designed to promote advancements in economic growth, democracy, and education throughout Macedonia.
- We all know very well that education is the most powerful tool for improving the lives of people and developing a better society. That is why I am very pleased with the partnership between USAID and the Foundation Open Society Institute in Macedonia to empower Roma people through education.
- Our Roma Education Program provides educational support to over 1,300 students from pre-school to university each year. We have many reasons to be proud of the program's results, including the fact that more Roma students are staying in school, more Roma students are completing school, and more Roma students are performing better in school.
- That is why I am pleased that USAID has decided to invest in the education of a new group of 120 Roma students currently in 11th grade. I believe that in two years from now, we will again have a reason to celebrate their graduation.
- High school graduation is much more than a simple ceremony; it is also the closing of one of life's chapters and the beginning of a new one. Young people are at the doorstep of their lives, where they will achieve great accomplishments, but also face challenges. Higher education is a valuable tool to help you tackle those challenges and I am very happy to hear that many of you have already decided to take the next step and enroll in university. I salute you on that decision, believing that each of you has much to contribute – both to the Roma community and to Macedonian society - as future lawyers, businessmen, doctors, teachers, and entrepreneurs; to name but a few of your many options in life.
- We are expecting to see more and more Roma primary, secondary and university graduates in the years to come. We are happy to witness the increasing number of well-educated Roma – like those here today - who will improve the position of Roma in society and prove that a cycle of poverty and exclusion can be broken.
- Someone once divided *human kind* into three categories: those who don't know what is happening, those who watch things happen, and those *who make things happen*. I am convinced that you will be the ones who will make things really happen for the benefit of the Roma community.
- Speaking of people who have made things happen, I would like to thank FOSIM for their dedicated work on the program, and the teachers and mentors for the enthusiasm, patience, time and energy that they devoted to assist all of our graduates.
- I would also like to thank and congratulate the parents – thank you for encouraging and supporting your children to succeed.
- Finally, I would like to congratulate each and every one of our graduates for your commitment, hard work and motivation. What you have accomplished has not been easy and you have every reason to be proud of yourselves. I wish you all the best of luck in your future life, in your university studies, and your professional careers.
- Thank you.