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PRESS RELEASE

Ceremony Honors Roma Graduates

98 Roma students graduating from secondary school this year were honored at a ceremony held by the USAID Roma Education Project (REP). These students received scholarships and mentoring from the REP for two school years to help them prepare for their Matura Exams. In addition, the ceremony honored 44 Roma university graduates who completed their studies in the past four years with support from the REP.

"We now see the Project's university graduates in a number of public positions....And we expect to see more and more Roma graduates in the years to come," said U.S. Ambassador Philip T. Reeker. "These individuals will not only be advancing their own lives, they will also become advocates for the Roma community in Macedonia, helping to improve the position of Roma in society and proving that the cycle of poverty and exclusion can be broken."

Sebijan Fejzula, a senior university student, spoke about what the Roma Education Project has meant to her. "The scholarship I obtained was my biggest support," she said. "It was a great alleviation since I knew I was not causing additional expenses to my parents' budget and I could continue my education. The scholarship was my motive, but a responsibility also to pass my exams successfully and justify the Program's investment in me."

The Roma Education Project is implemented by the Foundation Open Society Institute Macedonia (FOSIM), through comprehensive educational activities for students at all levels from pre-school to university. The project works to improve the retention and achievement rate of Roma youth. Over 1400 Roma students have directly benefited from REP interventions since the project began in 2004.

NOTE TO EDITORS:

The American people, through USAID, have invested nearly \$500 million in Macedonia since 1993. USAID is implementing projects that create jobs, reduce corruption, and prepare Macedonian students for the workforce. These initiatives improve the quality of life and support Macedonia's transition to a stable and prosperous democracy. USAID provides economic and humanitarian assistance in more than 100 countries. For more information please visit <http://macedonia.usaid.gov>.