

**Commemoration ceremony
to mark the International Remembrance Day of the *Pharrajimos*
Strasbourg, 1 August 2014**

Statement

by

Ulrich Bunjes

Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues, Council of Europe

We are gathered here today, together with the representatives of the European Roma and Travellers Forum, to pay homage to the victims of the *Pharrajimos* – to the Roma men, women and children murdered in the extermination camp of Auschwitz on 2 August 1944, but also the hundreds of thousands of Roma who perished at the hands of Fascist henchmen all over Europe, seven, eight decades ago. It was an act of genocide, the German government officially declared in 1982.

We are here to keep fresh the memory of these massacres.

For a long time, Europe turned a blind eye to what had happened. The *Pharrajimos* might have been forgotten if the Roma themselves had not struggled to keep the memory alive.

However, the horrors of the Roma Holocaust are an inextinguishable blemish on our history. Europe has a duty to face up to its legacy, to learn from past mistakes so that a repetition can be excluded. It is crucial to end the silence that has lasted for decades.

Many in Europe not only forgot past suffering, but continued the century-old practice of discrimination, ghettoization and segregation of Roma. Today, Roma are under threat in many of our member States. Physical aggression against them is frequent. Anti-Roma hate speech is widespread on the Internet, and can be found even in mainstream political discourse.

What can we do to change the way how Roma are seen and treated? As European citizens we have a joint responsibility to know, to inform, to educate, to empower; to protect and to sanction, if necessary.

The Council of Europe, the defender of human rights, is ready to meet this challenge. The fight for the social inclusion of Roma is one of our political priorities.

The Council of Europe has worked with scholars to elaborate materials for the teaching about the Holocaust and the Roma *Pharrajimos*. Today, at the “Roma Genocide Remembrance Initiative” organised in Cracow in Poland in cooperation with Roma youth organisations, we are publishing a handbook for young people on the Roma genocide. The manual, entitled “Right to Remember”, provides historical background and information on

human rights; and it suggests activities to help trainers and teachers who work with young people, to ensure they understand what happened and why.

The Council of Europe is running the *Dosta!* campaign throughout many member States, to address the negative stereotypes against Roma. We are running projects to assist municipalities and regions to strengthen Roma inclusion, and to improve the mediation between Roma communities and public authorities. We are working with ministries, with schools, teachers and civil society organisations. We work with the OSCE and the European Union.

Together with the City of Strasbourg and the European Roma and Travellers Forum, we will organise on 16 October a Holocaust commemorative event at the *Palais Joséphine*.

But more needs to be done, and urgently. We are currently exploring options for a broad-based European initiative — a “European Roma Institute” — to promote Roma identity, to fight anti-Gypsyism, to support the teaching of Roma history, language, culture and folklore.

Giving the history of Roma its rightful place in the history in Europe is crucial for building trust between Roma and non-Roma. It is essential for our struggle to achieve for all Roma a life in dignity; essential for ending hate and persecution; essential for a future where Roma across Europe enjoy human rights in freedom, security and equality.

This is the lesson to learn from the *Pharrajimos*, which we are commemorating today.

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, vividly regrets that he is unable to take part in this solemn ceremony and has asked me to represent him.

Let me end by quoting the poem of Santino Spinelli, reproduced on the “Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism” in Berlin:

*Sunken in face
extinguished eyes
cold lips
silence*

*a torn heart
without breath
without words
no tears.*

The legacy of the *Pharrajimos* will never go away.

Thank you.