

COMMEMORATIVE CEREMONY IN MEMORY OF THE ROMA VICTIMS OF THE
PHARRAJIMOS, THE HOLOCAUST OF THE ROMA

Tuesday, 2 August 2016 at 12:00
Forecourt of the Palais de l'Europe

**Dear Ambassadors, Excellences,
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,**

"SEVENTY-TWO years ago, and precisely during the night of 2-3 august 1944, the nightmare of over three thousands of Roma inmates in the "Zigeunerlager B III" at Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp came to an end. The Pharrajimos, the Holocaust of the Roma is by far the biggest tragedy in the history of the Roma. Personally, I lost some 50 persons from my mother's side of the family on the 2nd August night of the destruction, which is linking me into that cruel reality.

Today, it is time for every nation to stand up to say **WE WILL REMEMBER so that it will NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN**. We will not allow any excuse of anti-Gypsyism in our countries. We will not allow any form of prejudice to disrupt the multi-faith democracy we are so proud to call our biggest value.

Today we stand together - whatever our faith, whatever our creed, whatever our politics. We stand in remembrance of those who were murdered in the darkest hour of human history and we stand united in our resolve to fight anti-Gypsyism, anti-Semitism, Homophobia, Islamophobia and other forms of discrimination and prejudice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For many decades, the Roma survivors of Nazi persecution remained silent, rarely telling their stories or sharing their bitter experiences. Their voice was not heard. Consequently, since remembrance depends on people's memories, survivors' testimonies, research, historical records and official recognition, the Roma suffering went largely unnoticed.

After 1945, many countries did not acknowledge and **condemn the racial persecution of Roma; furthermore, for decades they pursued discriminatory practices against Roma and Sinti, including in the compensation process.**

The Roma continued to struggle for justice and for recognition of their place in the history books as victims of the Nazi regime. It has been a long struggle. Only in the early 1980s did Germany officially recognise that the extermination of the Roma was based on “racial” grounds. And only in 2001 did the State Museum of Auschwitz open a permanent exhibition on the Roma genocide.

Racist ideologies have not vanished from our world; there are still groups in society who are ready to preach such ideas and act upon them. Those who suffered during the Nazi era, including Roma and Sinti, cannot forget that racist ideologies were the root cause of their persecution at the time, and that is also why they feel particularly threatened today by extremist or neo-Nazi groups.

These groups are not afraid to go out to the public and praise the Nazi ideology, revive its symbols and slogans, and organise rallies and marches to celebrate the Nazi past. And, sadly, they continue to attract followers.

Roma are targeted in Europe once again because they're Roma. The contemptible incidents we are witnessing around Europe today are a warning cry for all of us to put an end to anti-Gypsyism Intolerance, Racism and Xenophobia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Remembering the Holocaust is the key - to fighting modern day racism and intolerance. It means a commitment to valuing human beings, their dignity and their rights. Remembering is not enough; laws which protect the dignity and rights of human beings have to follow. That was the logic of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and that is the logic of ensuring the principles of equality and non-discrimination within basic laws or constitutions. In the same way, law enforcement tools must be applied effectively to prevent or punish violent manifestations of racist and extremist ideologies. The Council of Europe, as the Human Rights Organisation is playing the key role in developing strategies and actively defending these values.

At the same time, we have to fight anti-Gypsyism through education and through the way we raise our children.

As a priority, parents should stop passing on anti-Gypsyism messages to their children, and they should no longer neglect the danger of hate speech, aggressive racism and xenophobia. The European Roma and Travellers Forum, jointly with other international organizations, have repeatedly called for the strengthening of efforts to promote tolerance and non-discrimination.

The European Roma and Travellers Forum in cooperation with the Council of Europe organised “The Forgotten Voices Conference” conference in April this year in Romania. This two-day conference was dedicated to the Roma victims of the Holocaust and aimed to achieve both the official and international recognition of the Genocide of the Roma, as well as improve the knowledge and teaching of the Roma Genocide in schools and amongst the wider public. **As a result of the conference Guidelines on the Steps towards Achieving Official Recognition of Anti-Gypsyism and on Promoting Remembrance and the Teaching of Roma History in Schools was produced and I would like to inform you that today we have published the guidelines. I invite each of you and in particular the member States of the CoE to make the most of it and put in practice the suggestions listed in that document.**

We must all work to close the empathy gap in our world today, where most of us ignore or dismiss the legitimate grievances of others.

Let us work together in building up our understanding of the need for tolerance and the importance of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence.