

**Commemoration ceremony International Remembrance Day
of the Roma Holocaust (Pharrajimos)
Strasbourg, 2 August 2017**

Ambassador Emil Ruffer

Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the Council of Europe

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear guests,

It is a great honour for me to speak on behalf of the Czech Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe at the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Roma Holocaust.

We have lived peacefully in Europe for more than 70 years. Despite some conflict areas on the map, which should not go unnoticed, overall we take friendly and peaceful relations among the nations of Europe for granted. And sometime we tend to forget the horrors of the not so distant past, when as an insult to humanity a large scale genocide was carried out on the European continent. A genocide which targeted not only the Jewish community, but Romas as well. Let me quote the former German President Mr Roman Herzog, who described it in the following terms:

“The genocide of the Sinti and Roma was carried out from the same motive of racial mania, with the same premeditation, with the same wish for the systematic and total extermination as the genocide of the Jews. Complete families from the very young to the very old were systematically murdered within the entire sphere of influence of the National Socialists.” (16 March 1997)

We must never let such atrocities happen again, and therefore we must remember the past. But merely remembering is not enough: we must use the presence to secure a better future. A future with equal access to education, healthcare, social services and proper housing for everyone. A future where the rich Roma cultural traditions will be respected and cherished as a source of inspiration. Let's hope and work for the future based on inclusive societies, where it will not matter whether you are a Jew or a Roma, because we are all humans and citizens of Europe.

Thank you for your attention.