

peter Höllenreiner, Holocaust Survivor

Dear prisoners of the Auschwitz concentration camp,
Dear relatives of the victims of the Holocaust,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear friends and guests!

My name is Peter Höllenreiner. I was born on March 17, 1939 in Munich. I was four years old when I and my family went to Auschwitz-Birkenau. I received the camp number Z3531. March 8, 1943 was the beginning of two years filled with fear and mindless murder of young and old. Two years, during which we were deprived of our dignity and respect for ourselves. The death machine in Auschwitz was consuming everyone. I remember when I was a baby, I was sleeping with my head on mom's knees. Not because I wanted to sleep so much, but because I had a few crumbs on my knees. I felt them under my cheek and I felt safe because I knew I would not die of starvation.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our families were killed by gas, burned down, humiliated, spat upon us and tormented only because of our Sinti origins. Until today I do not understand this.

When we were liberated in May 1945, it did not mean for us the surrender of Germany, but the liberation from tyrannical violence. As an adult, I wanted to erase this time from memory. I ordered to remove the camp number from my shoulder because I believed in the future full of opportunities and possibilities. But the systematic marginalization and discrimination of Roma and Sinti continues to this day. Offices and government doctors deprived us of compensation. My teacher, Mr. Haas, allowed me to sit down only in the last bench and ignore me or beat with his bat, depending on the mood. We, the Sinti children, were undesired in schools. We were collected in special classes. We have been rated in advance through the prism of our origins. Detention and search by the police were on the agenda. My Sinti origins were a sufficient reason to illegally abuse me and not only me, but all Roma and Sinti. The way in which the media to this day cast suspicions on Roma and Sinti as a community is unbearable to me. On the other hand, the victims of our minority are usually silent, just like last year's Munich cutthroat case.

People who find new words are also enormously creative, as long as they do not refer to us as Roma or Sinti. In Germany, the sarcastic term "rotating European" is commonly used, which suggests that we are moving our way of life. The fact that we are often forced to do so by circumstances and power, no longer matters. Racism and anti-culture in Europe are not yet overcome, on the contrary: old prejudices and stereotypes are experiencing a renaissance and again we are witnessing the emergence of extreme right-wing tendencies. That's why I ordered to tattoo my camp number back again. However, I changed "Z" to "J", because my grandmother also has Jewish roots.

Dear guests. It hurts me when I see people coming to us from other countries to study here or to start a new life are discriminated against, marginalized, treated as second-class people just because they are Roma.

Unequal treatment in almost all areas of life is still common for many Roma and Sinti. So I appeal to all of you here, my Roma brothers and government representatives: Fight together for equality of all people, express solidarity with the Roma and Sinti, and recognize us as the same people as the others.

Together we can achieve it, only if we just want to.

Thank you for your attention.