

2 August – European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day Ceremony

Dr. Joanna Talewicz, President of the Foundation Towards Dialogue

Dear Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, we gather to commemorate

We stand today in a place of great importance – symbolically and politically.

Here, at the Council of Europe, we commemorate the Holocaust of Roma and Sinti – not only the 4300 people murdered in the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau on August 2nd, 1944, but also all the victims: those who died in concentration and extermination camps, in mass executions outside the camps, and in places of silent, undocumented death.

We remember not only the loss of life – but also the unimaginable suffering.

We remember people who were stripped of dignity, identity, and humanity.

For me, this memory is deeply personal.

I was born in Oświęcim – just three kilometers from the former Auschwitz-Birkenau camp.

I was born into a Roma family, a family of both survivors and victims. I grew up with this history – but also with silence. With the absence of words to fully explain it.

I was fourteen, when I first took part in a commemoration of the Roma Holocaust held at the site of the former Zigeunerlager in Birkenau. It was the early 1990s. There were only a few of us. No one spoke of it publicly. And very few were willing to listen.

Today, many years later, I stand here – in the Council of Europe.

In a place where the memory of the Roma Holocaust is finally becoming part of the European conversation.

It moves me deeply. And it shows that change is possible. That we are not where we used to be. That there has been progress – step by step.

But we also know it is not enough.

The Roma Holocaust did not begin in Auschwitz.

It began long before – with hate speech, with exclusion, with the denial of dignity and humanity.

And we know that this process can repeat itself.

Because we still see prejudice. We still see violence. We still hear political and public language that dehumanizes.

Today, there are almost no survivors left among us.

I had the great privilege of meeting some of them. Speaking with them. Learning from them.

And their words are now a responsibility – to speak when others fall silent.

To remember not only in August, but every day.

To find a language that reaches the younger generation – those who are shaping our future.

Because memory without action becomes mere ritual.

That's why today we are not only commemorating.

We are also reminding ourselves: that each of us has a role to play.

That we are all responsible – for the present and for the future.

I believe that together – across ethnic, national and social boundaries – we can stop the machinery of hatred.

That education, awareness, and civil courage can build a different Europe.

One where history will not repeat itself because of our silence – or because we choose to look away.

Thank you.