

## Speech for the Ceremony for European Roma Holocaust Day- 24 July 2025

Mr Roberto Olla,

Excellencies,

Dear Colleagues,

Today, as we solemnly mark the 81st anniversary of one of the darkest nights in our shared history, we do more than remember - we stand witness.

Today's event is not just a ceremony.

It is a call to conscience.

A reckoning with our past.

An eye opener and a guidance.

History must not be forgotten. It must guide us.

Guide us to protect human dignity.

To uphold justice.

To stand against hatred — wherever it festers.

On the night between 2 and 3 August 1944, 3,000 Roma men, women and children were brutally murdered in the Auschwitz-Birkenau gas chambers.

This wasn't an accident or a tragic twist of fate.

It was a deliberate carnage and a calculated act of genocide.

It was part of a wider ruthless Nazi campaign. A campaign carried out under a regime that thrived on hate, racism, and dehumanisation.

Sadly, records account for approximately half a million Roma people across Europe systematically persecuted and killed during the Nazi era.

Yet, this atrocity remains one of the least acknowledged chapters of the Holocaust, often referred to as the "*Forgotten Holocaust.*"

But people should not be forgotten.

Not in life. Not in death.

To forget is to deny their humanity. And to deny humanity is to open the door once again to hate.

This remembrance is also about the present, and our duty to the future. Because the forces that led to that night in 1944 are not confined to history books.

They echo today in the form of hate speech, discrimination, and division.

For this reason, just a few weeks ago, the Maltese Presidency of the Committee of Ministers together with the Anti-Discrimination Department of the Council of Europe, co-organised the 2025 No Hate Speech Week.

Over three days, a wide range of stakeholders reflected on legal and policy developments.

They came together to act, to reinforce legal tools, to share what works, and to build alliances against the rising tide of hate.

For hate speech is extremely dangerous.

It not only targets minorities, but it corrodes democracy, divides people, dehumanizes human life and paves the way for radicalisation and hate crimes. Such as the one endured in August 1944.

In the context of the No Hate Speech Week, on 18 June, Malta's Presidency proudly co-hosted an award ceremony recognising excellence in ethical media reporting on Roma.

This event recognised the indispensable role of media professionals in promoting positive narratives and exposing uncomfortable truths affecting Roma and Traveller communities.

Roma and Traveller communities deserve recognition, respect, and belonging.

Malta may not have a Roma population, but our commitment is unwavering.

Our upcoming National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) will include dedicated measures on Roma equality. Because solidarity must extend beyond borders and demographics, and human rights must not depend on numbers.

Human rights matter.

Behind every statistic is a life. A name. A dream. A future that deserves protection.

Such lives deserve our attention and our action. Action that spans beyond words of condemnation.

Today, we condemn the massacre of August 1944.

But let us also condemn the hatred, devastation, discrimination, and destruction we are seeing today.

We have a collective responsibility to ensure that no other lives are forgotten, and no other people are brutally starved and killed.

Because silence, in the face of injustice, is complicity.

With this, I appeal to all of us here today:

Let us use this anniversary not only to reflect, but to recommit with urgency, with unity, and with purpose.

Hate has no place in our societies.

Let us stand up not just when it is easy, but when it truly counts.

With this, let us honour the innocent Roma lives lost in August 1944. Let us strive to ensure that every single being is treated with respect, fairness, and the humanity they deserve.