

**Commemoration Ceremony
on the occasion of the European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day
Strasbourg, 2 August 2022**

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Excellencies, dear colleagues, dear audience,

On behalf of Marija Pejčinović Burić, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, I welcome you to this commemorative ceremony.

We are gathered here today for the European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, to remember and pay tribute to the victims, and to honour the survivors of the mass annihilation of Roma during the Second World War.

More than 23 000 were killed in the so-called Gypsy-camp (*Zigeunerlager*) in Auschwitz-Birkenau, where on 2 August 1944, around 3 000 Roma men, women and children were murdered in one single night.

This Genocide was not formally acknowledged until 1982 when Helmut Schmidt, then Chancellor of West Germany, formally recognised that Nazi Germany had committed genocide against the Sinti and Roma. Since then, several member States have proceeded to recognise and officially establish a commemorative day and activities related to the remembrance of the Roma Holocaust.

The Roma Holocaust might have been forgotten if the Roma themselves had not struggled to keep the memory alive. It is crucial to end the silence that has lasted for decades. Europe has a duty to face up to its legacy and to learn from its past mistakes so that they are not repeated.

Unfortunately, the suffering of the Roma people did not finish with the end of the Second World War. Even today in our member States there is still evidence of racially motivated discrimination, hate speech, and hate crimes against Roma, as well as systematic persecution and forced evictions.

The war against Ukraine has brought to light once again the deeply rooted prejudices and antigypsyism against Roma. There have been reports, including from the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, that Ukrainian Roma fleeing from war have encountered discriminatory treatment in the provision of humanitarian assistance, transportation and have even faced evictions from temporary transit hubs and shelters.

Many Council of Europe member States have recognised the difficulties faced by Roma and the need to undertake effective measures to eradicate discrimination and antigypsyism. The values of upholding peace, tolerance and respect for human rights are paramount to avoid repeating the mistakes from the dark history of war.

The Council of Europe is ready to meet this challenge. The Organisation remains committed to Roma inclusion and will continue to work with all stakeholders to improve the daily lives of Roma.

Teaching about and remembering the Roma Holocaust remains a strategic priority. There is still a lack of knowledge about this tragedy. Education lays the basis for promoting tolerance and non-discrimination to counter persistent prejudice, hate speech and hate crimes against Roma.

The Committee of Ministers adopted a Recommendation on the inclusion of the history of Roma and Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials in order to eliminate stereotyping, promote diversity and ensure learning about our common European history. The Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (ADI-ROM) is tasked with preparing a capacity building programme and tools for the implementation of this Recommendation.

At the same time, remembrance activities pay respect to the victims and ensure that the mass murder of Roma and Sinti during the Second World War becomes part of our public consciousness. We must ensure that the many sites which witnessed the persecution and extermination are recognised and remembered.

One of the remembrance initiatives supported by the Council of Europe in the past years is “Dikh He Na Bister – Look and don’t forget”. The commemoration ceremony taking place today in the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial is being attended also by two Roma youth groups from Bosnia and Herzegovina and from Serbia thanks to Council of Europe financial support. Today “Dikh He Na Bister” is launching a campaign to raise donations in support of Roma Holocaust survivors in Ukraine.

Dear friends,

It is essential in our struggle for inclusion of Roma that we focus on life with dignity, on ending hate and persecution and ensuring a future where Roma across Europe enjoy human rights in freedom and security.

We must never allow ourselves to forget.

We must remember.