

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my privilege to be here today on behalf of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance and in my capacity as the Chair of the IHRA's Committee on the Genocide of the Roma.

We are gathered here today to commemorate the Roma and Sinti victims on the occasion of the International Commemoration Day of the Roma genocide. It was on 2 August 1944 that the last remaining Sinti and Roma women, men and children in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp were taken to the gas chambers and murdered, persecuted on so-called racial grounds. Some have survived this horrifying persecution and some of these survivors are with us today. I thank you for being here with us today.

For too long there was silence about the persecution of the Roma under the Nazi regime. For too long the survivors were not heard. Today we stand together to break this silence and to give a voice to the victims and the survivors.

The IHRA unites 31 governments and around three hundred experts to strengthen, advance and promote Holocaust education, remembrance and research worldwide. The member countries fulfil the commitments of IHRA's founding document, the 2000 Stockholm Declaration. The IHRA has also dedicated itself to raising awareness & understanding of the Roma genocide and its consequences.

I have been chairing the Committee on the Genocide of the Roma and Sinti for the last year and a half and together with my colleagues from all over Europe and North America we have been pursuing four goals.

- The first is the reason we are here today: to pay tribute to the victims and to honor them. This is and must be at the root of all that we do. It is our guiding principle that commemoration events are not the responsibility of those groups affected – they are the responsibility of the whole of society and governments.

- The second is to raise awareness about the genocide of the Roma and Sinti under National Socialism in the IHRA member states and worldwide.  
Here the official recognition of August 2<sup>nd</sup> as international Remembrance Day of the genocide of the Roma by the IHRA member countries has priority for our committee.
- The third aim is to draw attention to the on-going prejudice towards Roma and Sinti during and after the Second World War as well as to demonstrate the link between the history of discrimination and persecution and the present situation of the Roma and Sinti. Societal marginalization expressed, for instance through antigypsyism, affects not only the minority but threatens the democratic principles of society at large.
- And the fourth is to empower Roma and Sinti civil society through adequate forms of commemoration. We should never understand remembrance and commemoration as empty rituals, but rather as a contribution to upholding those democratic values which form the foundations of European civil society. Identity needs remembrance. And people who have a strong identity are able to face challenges in the present with greater self-confidence.

Let me just mention two concrete examples in the fields of commemoration and education where IHRA is currently active:

IHRA, Austria and France have funded the first comprehensive online education platform on the genocide of the Roma and Sinti for teachers and students. The website is already available in English, French, German, Calderas and Croatian. More languages will follow and the website has become an important international learning tool.

IHRA and our committee also see it as a priority to resolve issues with endangered memorial sites: Sites which do not allow for an appropriate commemoration of the victims. The current places of concern are Lety, Komarom, Staro Sajmiste and Jasenovac. We visit these sites and hold talks with the political level, the issue is regularly discussed in the Plenary meetings of IHRA and both the expert and political level engage in a constructive exchange on how to mark these sites, preserve them and prevent their misuse.

We are confident that in the case of the former Roma concentration camp Lety in the Czech Republic the industrial pig farm will soon be removed and the victims will be honored and

remembered in a respectful and appropriate way. Lety is an example of what has been achieved but also of how much more there is to do.

I am moved to be here today with you all and I am inspired to continue our efforts to raise public awareness of the genocide of the Roma and Sinti and its consequences. Let us continue to break the silence. Let us give the victims and survivors a voice.

Thank you.