



INTERNATIONAL
**HOLOCAUST
REMEMBRANCE**
ALLIANCE

02 August 2019

Commemoration of the Genocide of Sinti and Roma

Center for Dialogue and Prayer, Oświęcim

Honorable high representatives of States, governments, international and national institutions,
Distinguished participants of this commemorative gathering,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me at the outset pay my deepest respect and bow my head in memory of all those who perished in the name of a racist, inhuman and barbaric terror regime. And I bow my head before all of you who survived the painful nightmare and the brutalities of a cynical and inhuman ideology.

We think today of your traumas and your torments that have accompanied you for the rest of your life after you escaped the earthly hell. Your presence is a gift to all of us who belong to the later born generations. In these difficult times that seem to forget the lessons which we expected to be part of our common collective memory, we need you more than ever. May you by your sheer presence continue to testify of the horrible past for many years to come.

Some three weeks ago I paid a visit to the “Central Council of German Sinti and Roma” and in the newsletter that was issued after my visit in Heidelberg there was also an article with a photograph that extended best wishes on the occasion of the 95th anniversary of a survivor of Lety camp and of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Why do I mention this? The human mind is unable of seizing the horrific dimension of almost 6 million killed Jews and of hundreds of thousands of Roma and Sinti. It becomes an anonymous mass and our feelings risk even to become dulled. That tends to happen everyday before our eyes when we speak of thousands of victims in Yemen and Syria or of the hundreds of migrants being drowned in the Mediterranean.

Behind every sterile number there is a human face and thus I added in secret my best wishes to the 95 years of Mrs. Zilly Reichmann, but when I read about all the dozens of family members whose ashes remained here in Auschwitz-Birkenau I was moved to tears. This is the history of so many of you and therefore you are the most forceful stronghold when it comes to counter distortion and denial. I want to express my deep-felt gratitude to the organizers who have invited me to tell you what I feel before you and in this place, the symbol of how profoundly mankind can fall.

And yet, despite your continuing testimonies, despite the existence of places of horror like this one, denial and distortion have never stopped and worse, we see a resurgence in populism and nationalism and an increase in anti-Semitism, antigypsism and other shameful forms of discrimination and hate.



I have today the honour to speak here as Chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance/IHRA, founded almost 20 years ago to defend the memory of the Jewish victims of Nazism and to fight for a life of our Jewish compatriots in a societal environment without denigration, discrimination or even brutal attacks.

This mandate with the same ambition encompasses since 2007 the memory of the ordeal of the Roma people and the strife for a betterment of their living conditions as our fellow citizens in many of our European societies.

We have given ourselves in 2017 a new strategy that focuses on two pillars: countering distortion and safeguarding the record. Safeguarding the record and thus preserving and protecting the authentic sites of suffering is a fundamental element of our determination to raise awareness of the persecution and annihilation of the Roma and the Jewish people.

We are proud to have found as IHRA a solution for the preservation of the Roma concentration camp in Lety u Pisku, where the Roma people will be able to remember their beloved family members in a dignified way. We will do our utmost to help putting into place a valid concept for Komaron and I will hold talks soon in Croatia and Serbia in order to see with the State authorities in charge on how we should adequately keep the sites of Topovske Šupe, of Staro Sajmište and of Jasenovac. They are strong tools when it comes to remember the past and prevent the evil to stick out its neck again. Paying tribute to the victims and honouring them, notably in commemoration events like this one are the responsibility of the whole of our societies, not only of the victim groups directly concerned. Remembrance, commemoration, fight for justice and equal treatment are among the fundamental values that form the foundation of our post-war, democratic, pluralistic and inclusive society, principles on the basis of which most of the European continent has been united since 1989.

We must all be conscious that there are prejudices towards Roma that have continued after WWII and are still present in our societies both in the East and in the West of our continent. Sometimes discriminatory tendencies and tensions are even fostered and stirred up by irresponsible, populist politicians throughout all the geographical parts of Europe and beyond. The IHRA has gained recently in visibility because of its working definition on antisemitism adopted in 2016.

The Committee on the Genocide of the Roma of the IHRA is currently engaged in drafting a working definition on antigypsism and I trust that this endeavour can be brought to a fruitful end in a not too distant future.

The future policy of IHRA will forcefully take into account the plight of the Roma people in historic terms and in the present political situation. The sufferings single persons have gone through cannot be hierarchised in a historic dimension and there must be a global approach when it comes to engage our societies in a policy of containment of sickening practices and a counteraction against these phenomena.

Let me end my speech at this heartening commemoration ceremony by making a promise to you the survivors: "You and your legacy will never be forgotten".