

President of the Republic of Poland

Warsaw, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2014

To the participants of the ceremony  
on the International Genocide Remembrance Day  
of the Roma and Sinti –  
the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liquidation of the “Zigeunerlager”  
in the concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau

Dear Sirs and Madams,

Seventy years ago, an incredible crime took place in the Nazi extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. In just one night the German occupants exterminated almost 3000 Roma who had been detained in the so-called Zigeunerlager – a family camp for Roma. On the International Genocide Remembrance Day of the Roma, the whole world commemorates the victims of this inhuman crime. We commemorate each child, each woman, each man, we commemorate whole families and communities who were arrested, brutally tortured and murdered. We commemorate more than 20 000 Sinti and Roma who were murdered by the Nazis in the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp as well as all other victims of the extermination of Roma in Europe.

The liquidation of the so-called Zigeunerlager, which took place in 1944, was one last act of the drama which Roma people detained in this camp had to live. Inhuman conditions, hunger and disease, the wardens' brutal terror as well as criminal medical “experiments” depleted the number of the prisoners every day. The extent of the crimes committed against the Roma and the incredible pain that was brought to all victims of the extermination is still shocking today.

German Nazi murdered members of Roma communities all over Europe, including the occupied Republic of Poland. The same republic of which the Roma had been a part of for centuries, going the complicated ways of history on its side. The same republic which established a “Roma leader” in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and which enacted a law in order to acknowledge the rights of Roma in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, an action quite exceptional at that time.

The Roma were the third most numerous group that was murdered by the Nazi in Auschwitz. The memory of all victims and the obligation to commemorate them is a special part of us as citizens of Poland. The scream of protest, the call for humanity should never cease to jog the conscience of the world.

We, the people of today, have to repeat it loud and clear, that we shall never let another Porajmos, another extermination of Roma happen! Our obligation towards the victims of the Porajmos is not only commemoration, but also the imperative to stand up against any form of hostility towards the Roma and other ethnic minorities, any form of racism and xenophobia. This requires courage and determination from all citizens of Poland and Europe.

Today, on the International Genocide Remembrance Day of the Roma and Sinti, the world, including the people of Poland, commemorates Roma victims of the German Nazi. We commemorate all those who were tormented to death in Auschwitz-Birkenau and other places of execution, Roma women, Roma men and Roma children. No to racism! No to the contempt towards human beings, their rights and their dignity! Let us honour the murdered Roma appropriately today!

Bronisław Komorowski

Vatican, 14<sup>th</sup> July 2014

Dear Sir,

His Holiness Francis, who was informed about the ceremony on the Genocide Remembrance Day of the Roma and Sinti on 2<sup>nd</sup> August of this year, would like to express His spiritual unity with the participants of this event and to assure them that he shall commemorate the victims in a special way and pray for the entire Roma community.

On this occasion He would also like to remind you all of the pilgrimage of Pope Benedict XVI to Auschwitz-Birkenau and the words he said there: "Like John Paul II, I have walked alongside the inscriptions in various languages erected in memory of those who died here... All these inscriptions speak of human grief, they give us a glimpse of the cynicism of that regime which treated men and women as material objects, and failed to see them as persons embodying the image of God... Another inscription offering a pointed reminder is the one written in the language of the Sinti and Roma people. Here too, the plan was to wipe out a whole people which lives by migrating among other peoples. They were seen as part of the refuse of world history, in an ideology which valued only the empirically useful; everything else, according to this view, was to be written off as lebensunwertes Leben – life unworthy of being lived... These people jar our memory, they touch our hearts. They have no desire to instil hatred in us: instead, they show us the terrifying effect of hatred. Their desire is to help our reason to see evil as evil and to reject it; their desire is to enkindle in us the courage to do good and to resist evil. They want to make us feel the sentiments expressed in the words that Sophocles placed on the lips of Antigone, as she contemplated the horror all around her: my nature is not to join in hate but to join in love."

In the context of this memory, the Holy Father would like to express his deepest respect for the Roma People Association in Poland as well as all other people who commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the extermination of Roma and Sinti, the sacrifice that was brought by 2897 innocent men, women and children who were exterminated in the gas chambers of the concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau in the night of the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1944, as well as the 23 000 sons and daughters of this nation who had been detained in this camp and suffered a terrible death.

May this sacrifice brought by innocent people, especially children, and the incredible suffering brought to the nation of Roma and Sinti be a continuous message to the modern world and a challenge to create a civilization of love based on respect towards life and dignity of each human being: "The Lord will give strength to his people: the Lord will bless his people with peace" (Ps 29 [28]: 11).

The Holy Father recommends all those who suffered a martyr's death, the victims of the camp as well as all those who were left behind with their pain, suffering and tragic memories to the Love of God. He gives the Apostolic Blessing to the organisers and participants of the ceremony straight from His heart.

Yours sincerely,  
Archbishop Angelo Becciu  
for the Secretariat of State

Message of Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament  
to the participants of the commemoration ceremony  
on the International Genocide Remembrance Day of the Roma and Sinti  
at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

2<sup>nd</sup> August 2014

Dear Sirs and Madams,

70 years ago, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1944, a murder of Roma people was committed in one of the darkest venues of World War II. Sometimes this event is even referred to as the Holocaust of the Roma. Since 1997 we have been celebrating the Genocide Remembrance Day of the Roma and Sinti to commemorate the death of 2897 Roma people who died during the liquidation of the "Zigeunerlager" in the concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau in the year 1944.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum is not an ordinary Museum. It is a memorial site commemorating the shameful actions of the Third Reich and its hate machine. National socialism was based on hatred towards other nations, ethnic groups and persons of different political views or sexual orientations. This evil touched Roma from all over Europe as well. It is estimated that half a million Roma and Sinti were murdered during World War II just because of their distinctiveness.

The commemoration of this extermination of the Roma is our moral obligation. The integration of Roma is a challenge for all of us as humans. However, it is also a difficult task.

Let us remember the European motto "United in diversity" and let us be open to all Europeans without any exceptions. This lesson is of great importance for us today as well. Extremists who want to restore this shameful ideology and who deny the Holocaust have found their way into the European Parliament.

For me as the President of the European Parliament it is of utmost importance that all inhabitants of Europe feel at home on our continent. Discrimination based on nationality, race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation brings us back to these dark times of totalitarianism and fascism.

I would like to look back to these days and pay a tribute to the victims of this unfair crime.

The extermination of Roma and Sinti – which is called "Porajmos", devouring, in their language – shall forever be a testimony of intolerance and hostility towards their different lifestyle and tradition. Although I cannot take part in this special ceremony today, I am joined with you in prayer and commemoration.

Martin Schulz

President Elect  
Reuven (Ruby) Rivlin

Jerusalem, 2.08.2014

Today we commemorate the 70th anniversary of the liquidation of the so-called Zigeunerlager in the death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau.

In this place, one of the scariest places in the history of mankind, where more than 1,1 million people – innocent men, women and children – have been murdered, the German Nazi carried out their demonic plan to exterminate Jews as well as Roma and Sinti. The Jews, Roma and Sinti were dying together – here in Auschwitz and in other places.

Here, on the site of this death camp, lies one of the darkest “black holes” of this world, made by bestialized humans. This is one of the places where we should not ask where God had been, but where the human had been!

Unfortunately, this question is just as prevailing today as it was back then.

Today, 70 years later, we are still dealing with disgusting phenomena like hatred, violence and xenophobia; we still observe anti-Semitism in Europe; we still are confronted with discrimination of Roma and Sinti. We have to fight against these phenomena. We cannot accept them. Nobody should.

The state of Israel and the Jewish world stand by your side today, sons and daughters of Roma and Sinti, in order to remember and commemorate together. We shall not forget. Let us speak our pledge out loud: Never again.

Reuven (Rubi) Rivlin  
President of the State of Israel

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Office of the Spokesperson

For Immediate Release

August 2, 2014

STATEMENT BY SECRETARY KERRY

Statement in Commemoration of the World War II Genocide of Roma

We pause today to mourn and remember the hundreds of thousands of Romani men, women and children who were savagely and senselessly murdered by the Nazis during World War II.

On this day, 70 years ago, Romani men, women, and children were taken from their quarters at Auschwitz and sent to the gas chambers. Over the course of a single night, the Nazis sent 2,879 Roma to their deaths. Entire families were lost.

Today, we remember the 23,000 Romani persons from 11 countries who were sent to Auschwitz, and the 19,000 who perished. We remember the men, women, and children who died from inhumane medical experiments, and the many more who died from disease and starvation. And we remember that the appalling murder of Roma didn't stop at the camp's edge. In parts of Nazi-occupied territory, Roma were rounded up, shot at village outskirts, and dumped into mass graves.

Above all, we remember our common responsibility to stand strong against the cruel sting of bigotry and injustice. Racism against Roma persists even today, and racism anywhere is a threat to people everywhere. We must condemn all prejudice wherever it springs up, because we know that words of hatred too often become acts of hatred.

Teaching about Romani experiences during the Holocaust is critical in combating prejudice. We commend Germany's efforts to remember the Romani victims of the Nazis, including the memorial unveiled in Berlin two years ago.

We can learn from our history, and, together, we can change its course for generations to come.

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Krystyna Gil

Dear Sirs and Madams, Brothers and Sisters. Today we meet in this place on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of a tragic event, in the course of which our relatives, families, our nation, the Roma and Sinti, were murdered. Many of those who are present here today are witnesses of these events. It is a huge experience to come here and take part in the ceremony. How many of us had to watch their loved ones die? Auschwitz is a special place, the ground we are standing on was poured over with the blood of hundreds of thousands of innocent people. This is why we have to remember these events, just as we have to remember that Roma and Sinti were not only murdered in extermination camps. They were victims of genocide in other places as well. Shot while wandering, in ghettos, in their own houses. I can remember these times as if it was yesterday...

They killed them all in July 1943. That night I was five. I still remember a lot.

The Roma lived on the outskirts of Szczurowa. My grandfather, who was a Roma, had an orchestra. No wedding could have taken place without him. My grandma was Polish and a housewife. One day a neighbour came to visit her, he was Polish as well, and he said: do not sleep at home. She did not listen.

It was 3 a.m. Grandma was just on her way to the toilet. Suddenly she ran into the room and cried: We're dead. The Germans had surrounded the houses. They told us to come out. Grandpa refused to, so they shot him. I only saw him fall to the floor and not get up again. I didn't understand what had happened.

They led us out onto the street. Horse wagons were waiting there. Polish people were driving them. Had they refused to do that, they would have been killed as well. The Germans put handcuffs on all the men and put them on the wagons like that. They drove away towards the cemetery and soon we could hear shooting. The women and children started to scream. We already knew what was going on. The horse wagons came back. I sat next to my mum, brother and little sister. My grandma had no place left, so she stood at the side of the road. Mum took me and told her: Take her, if you survive you will at least have her left. Grandma didn't want me. She wanted my brother, because he was older. She called his name. But he said: Mama is going to die and I am going to die with her. He was taken away. I stayed. They did not shoot little children, they thought it was a waste of ammunition. There was a chapel next to the cemetery, a neighbour from our village hid inside. He told us everything later on. The Germans grabbed the children by their legs, smashed their heads against the wall and then threw them into a hole. This is how my sister died. The hole had already been there. I don't know who had made it.

They came back for us. Five, maybe six people were left. We were driving through the market place where Mrs. Piotrowska had a restaurant. She invited the Germans for a meal. They came in. A policeman approached us and said: Run for your life now. Grandma and I, we ran over the fields, scared of someone seeing us and giving us away. Finally we came to Rzemienowice and we lived there until 1945.

Grandma took me to Szczurowa each year, to the very place where they were killed. She said: I am going to die, you are going to live. You must not forget.

They killed more than 90 people there. Afterwards, the ground was moving for 3 days. The blood was almost leaking out of it.

... So many years have gone by and I still remember. I did as my grandma told me, I did not forget, that is why I am here with you today and share my story with you. I am glad to see so many young people here. It's up to you what this world is going to look like in the future. That is why I am telling you - do not forget! Never forget!



Speech at the 70th anniversary of the liquidation of the so-called "Gypsy Camp" in Auschwitz-Birkenau on the 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1944  
Auschwitz, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2014

Claudia Roth, vice-president of the German Bundestag

Dear Sirs and Madams,  
dear Young People,  
dear Contemporary Witnesses,  
dear Guests,  
dear Friends!

In this place,  
Auschwitz, where all human values have been destroyed,  
Auschwitz, where civilization failed,  
in this place and on this day, as we commemorate the liquidation of the so-called "Gypsy Camp" which took place 70 years ago in summer 1944, I feel deep sorrow and humbleness as I speak to you in the name of the German Bundestag, which is a great honour to me.  
We have gathered here to confront this place and this incredible crime.  
This place, which stands for infinite dread, violence, terror and genocide, seems to weigh down every word, every gesture.  
About 23 000 Roma and Sinti were detained in the so-called "Gypsy Camp" in part BIIe of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp.  
Only 2000 of them survived from this genocide. 5000 people were gassed in this camp, 2900 of them brutally murdered during the liquidation of the camp in the night of the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1944.  
Other Roma and Sinti died of hunger, enforced labour and diseases in the camp.  
We are here today to bow to those who died.  
And it is right here, at this crime scene, that we would like to give a promise to the living:  
Never again shall Europe witness such a methodical genocide as the one carried out in Auschwitz in Nazi times.  
As a citizen of Germany and representative of the democratic German government I feel an enormous responsibility that our history placed upon me and each and every German citizen.  
Thus I would like to apologize to all the Roma and Sinti who have gathered here today to commemorate together. In the name of all of us, I would like to apologize for the incredible injustice and harm that had been done to you and your loved ones.  
I am ashamed for what German people did to you all, including Roma and Sinti who were Germans themselves.  
More than 20 000 Roma and Sinti died in Auschwitz, many of which came from Austria and Germany.  
In total, 500 000 Roma and Sinti lost their lives as a consequence of the systematic persecution and murdering in the Third Reich.  
It was an attempt to completely erase your culture.  
However, in spite of all these atrocities that left a deep mark in the souls of European Roma and Sinti, today we can say for sure: The Nazis did not succeed.

They did not succeed in destroying the culture and diversity of the European nations. They did hurt the European communities deeply and impoverish the cultural abundance of our continent, but they did not succeed in destroying it completely.

70 years after the end of the Nazi terror, I can state with joy and deep belief that Roma and Sinti are an inherent part of the European culture, of our ethnic and cultural diversity as well as of all the communities they have been living in for ages.

This survival, this inheritance was the strongest weapon against the Nazi attempts to carry out genocide and today it still is the strongest weapon against shameful demonstrations of discrimination and exclusion that the European Roma and Sinti still have to deal with.

This ceremony is a reminder to us all to stand up against any forms of violation of the human rights in our common Europe!

Avner Shalev, the director of the Yad Vashem Institute, said once:

"Auschwitz is a place where we take up our common responsibility for commemoration in the future in order to create a better society".

However, if we want to create and preserve a better society, we all have to oppose situations in which people are deprived of:

- access to health care,
- access to education,
- chances on the labour market,
- their rights,
- and when they are subject to violence just because they are Roma or Sinti.

I am ashamed, when I see the poor conditions that many European Roma and Sinti live in today,

- being unnoticed,
- being ignored,
- being left unspoken.

I am deeply moved by the fact that many Roma and Sinti still do not dare to speak about their descent openly and hide their identity because of fear of exclusion, humiliation and discrimination. Europe is the home of 12 million Roma and Sinti.

A home that they belong to and that needs them.

That is why this ceremony means not just commemorating the past, but also taking the responsibility for the present and a look into the future.

Today we need to take on the responsibility that has been placed upon us by the atrocities of the past.

Let us fight together against the exclusion of Roma and Sinti. Let the lesson we learned from our history help us live the moral imperative which states that human dignity shall be inviolable.

Thank you!