

About the Person:

Romani Rose Chairman of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma

He was born in Heidelberg in 1946. Until 1982 he lived there as an independent businessman. At the founding of the Central Council in 1982 he was voted to the position of Chairman by the delegates of the member organisations – then nine, now 16 state and regional associations – and since then has been confirmed in his post every four years at the member meetings. From 1991 Rose overtook the management of the Documentation and Culture Centre of German Sinti and Roma in Heidelberg. For years he has been known by the federal and state governments for his resoluteness and for his persistent and unyielding work.

Together with the Chairpersons of the national minorities in Germany Rose leads the Minority Council, which was grounded on September 9 2004. It is the union of the umbrella organisations of the four national minorities which belong to the German nation and have always been resident and autochthonous here: The DOMOWINA of the Sorbs, the Friesian Council, the South Schleswig Association of the Danish minority, and the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma. Along with delegates of minorities from the USA, Mexico, Argentina, Japan, India, Sri Lanka, France and Holland Rose is also a member of the management committee of the International Movement Against Discrimination and Racism (IMADR) founded in Tokyo in 1988.

A considerable motivation for Rose's efforts is his personal connection to the past. Thirteen direct relatives of Romani Rose were murdered in concentration camps under National Socialism, including his grandparents in the camps Auschwitz and Ravensbruck. His father, Oskar Rose, survived on the run and in the underground. Romani Rose's uncle, Vincenz Rose, survived the extermination camp Auschwitz, medical experiments in the Natzweiler concentration camp, and slave work for Daimler-Benz in the underground tunnels of the KZ Neckarelz/Obrigheim. In 1972 Vincenz Rose founded the first self organisation of German Sinti, the Central Committee of Sinti in West Germany, in which the then not even 13 year old Romani Rose helped out.

For two and a half decades –since June 1979 to be more exact – he has lead the work for the civil rights of German Sinti and Roma before the eyes of the German as well as the international public; he has also fought for their protection from racism and discrimination, for compensation for the survivors of the Holocaust – at the same time announcing the magnitude and the historical importance of the genocide of 500 000 Sinti and Roma in National Socialist occupied Europe. In May 1995, in cooperation with the member organisations of the Central Council, Rose achieved recognition for German Sinti and Roma as a national minority in Germany with their own minority language, connected with their goal of equal participation in social and political life.

To the first important steps of this civil rights work belong:

- the hunger strike by 12 Sinti in the former KZ Dachau on Easter 1980, organised and participated in by Rose, to get international attention for the genocide and to protest against the continued use of "Gypsy-Race"-files of the Reichs Security Main Office by German police and other authorities decades after the end of the war;
- the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, co-founded on February 6 1982 by Rose and since then lead by him, and until the year 2000 the only and till today the most influential umbrella organisation of state and regional associations of German Sinti and Roma;

- the delegation of German Sinti and Roma lead by Rose to meet the former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, who proclaimed the historically important and internationally binding recognition of the National Socialist crimes against Sinti and Roma as genocide determined by their so-called "Rasse" (race).

In the following years the Central Council drew attention to its demands again and again in the form of protests, press conferences, and events, each under the management of Rose. Examples of such are:

- 1) The protest action organised by Rose by 220 Sinti and Roma on January 28 1983 (to the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the seizing of power by the Nazis) at the Federal Bureau of Criminal Investigation against the racially discriminating publications and criminal investigation department learning materials on Sinti and Roma with formulations taken from NS literature;
- 2) The action with 400 Sinti and Roma KZ survivors in Bonn on November 20 1986 in connection with Rose's comments in front of a Federal press conference to the first 525 cases of withheld payments of compensation under the Federal Compensation Law, handed over at the office of the Chancellor;
- 3) The until now unique memorial mass initiated by Rose, given by the Bishop Dr. Anton Schlembach in the Speyer cathedral on March 13 1988, the 45th anniversary of the deportation of 23 000 European Sinti and Roma to Auschwitz. On Rose's invitation 1500 Sinti and Roma from all over Germany and personalities such as the then President of the Upper House Dr. Bernhard Vogel and the then President of the Lower House Prof. Rita Süßmuth came to the mass;
- 4) The demonstration by 250 Sinti and Roma Holocaust survivors, lead by Rose, at the Federal Ministry of Finance for the following through of equal payment of compensation for forced work to the ca. 1 800 KZ survivors represented by the Central Council to that end in the years 2002 to 2006;
- 5) Public meetings, gaining signatures on petitions (with 2124 German Sinti and Roma, among which were 1520 KZ survivors), other actions and many press appointments since 1989 demanding the erection of the Holocaust memorial for murdered Sinti and Roma on the position between the Reichstag and the Brandenburg Gate agreed to for 1994.

The two and a half decades of non-stop engagement by Rose for the compensation of KZ victims gained fundamental significance for the embodiment of the civil rights work in the whole minority. In the course of 20 years since 1985 the office in Heidelberg - which was sponsored by the Federal government since August 1982 and since the year 2000 by the state Minister for Culture and Media - the Central Council, under the crucial leadership of Rose, brought about a significant change to the earlier discriminatory procedure of compensation for 3 200 Sinti and Roma Holocaust survivors. As such Rose and his staff of workers, chosen as the authorized representatives by the survivors, were able to push through new positive decisions by the state and federal compensatory authorities in every individual case.

Unique in Europe is the Documentation and Culture Centre of German Sinti and Roma, managed by Rose. It was demanded by Rose after the 1980 hunger strike, established at the beginning of the ninties with financial help from the federal government, and then with the cooperation of the then leadership of the country (Federal President Prof. Herzog, President of the Lower House Prof. Süßmuth, and President of the Upper House Teufel) it and the large permanent exhibition on the National Socialist genocide was opened by Rose on March 13 1997. More than 700 Sinti and Roma from Germany as well as

numerous personalities from home and abroad took part in the opening ceremony, including the ambassadors from 22 European countries and Israel.

Corresponding to Rose's initiatives a transportable version of the exhibition has been shown in many German cities since 1998 – most often in conjunction with an accompanying programme organised by the Documentation Centre.

Belonging to the most important results of the work of the Documentation Centre is the international exhibition on the genocide against Sinti and Roma in Europe, developed with personal oversight from Rose, which, since its opening on August 2 2001 has been available for viewing as a permanent exhibition in Block 13 of the State Museum at Auschwitz.

With the workers of the Documentation Centre Rose developed the English language version of the exhibition about the genocide against Sinti and Roma in National Socialist occupied Europe and about present racism against members of the national Sinti and Roma minorities in various European countries. Rose opened this exhibition on January 17 2006 in the European Parliament in Straßburg with participation from the Parliamentary President Borell Fontelles, further personalities, and representatives of Sinti and Roma from several European states. Since then the exhibition is being shown in European cities such as Budapest, Prague, and Warsaw (from October 2006).

Over the course of 2006 Rose has organised for this English exhibition to be opened on January 27 2007 in New York at the United Nations and thus it will be seen with great international attention.

As a result of this international work Rose, as the first representative of Sinti and Roma, was appointed on May 29 2006 as a member of the International Auschwitz Council by the Polish Government.

Heidelberg, 2006