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Romani Rose

Address by the Chairman of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma on the European Holocaust Remembrance Day for Sinti and Roma in Auschwitz-Birkenau on 2 August 2019

Dear Mrs Baker, Mrs Fahidi-Puztai, Mr Dedic,  
dear Reverend Jackson,  
Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome you on behalf of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma and the Roma Association in Poland and its chairman Roman Kwiatkowski on this memorial service, which we are organizing in close cooperation with the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau and its director Piotr Cywinski.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp is a symbol of the state-organized genocide of 500,000 Sinti and Roma and six million Jews. During the night of 1 to 2 August 1944, the last surviving Sinti and Roma, especially mothers with their children and old people, were murdered in the gas chambers. As we now know from the recent research of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, many more people than long ago were accepted - nearly 4,300 of them were murdered here one night 75 years ago. We commemorate this sacrifice today. We commemorate all victims of the Holocaust, and we commemorate all the victims of National Socialism.

The combination of inhuman ideology and barbarism, cold bureaucratic logic and murderous efficiency - which found its most visible expression in Auschwitz and the other National Socialist murder factories - eludes all historical comparisons to this day. The Nazi ideology combined murderous nationalism with equally fatal racism and both became the basis and justification of the entire state and society. The racism of the Nazis, with its core of extreme and radical anti-Semitism and antigypsyism, was the very essence of the Third Reich, and this marks the Holocaust: a crime against humanity. A break in civilization that is unique in history.

Auschwitz is a place of remembrance and at the same time a place of legacy. Because the victims complain millions of times in the face of today's crimes against humanity. Auschwitz is the conscience of the community of values of democratic states. Today we are confronted in Europe, but also around the world, with a pathological nationalism that for some years has again been directed against the European idea, against our democratic values, against human rights and thus against all of us.

Since the pogrom of Rostock in 1992 - which was first targeted against Roma refugees, since the murders of the so-called "National Socialist Underground (NSU)", until the murder of the district president Walter Lübcke in Kassel in June this year, and now a few days ago the racist attempted murder of an Eritrean in Germany, and the murder of a Roma in Kosovo committed by far-right nationalists,

We know that right-wing extremist networks exist in Germany and far beyond in Europe as well as in all other parts of the world.

However, these networks are only the tip of a new violent nationalism that questions and wants to eliminate all the fundamental values of our democracy. But the really scary thing is that this nationalism now dominates much of current politics. If Sinti and Roma are to be seized separately in member states of the European Community in order to expel them, then this will invalidate the foundations of our European community of values for our minority. Moreover, the violent nationalists are still justified by state policy.

It is rightly being warned against growing antigypsyism, anti-Semitism and racism. Because not only for us Sinti and Roma the aggravating social conflicts mean a great danger. We know it from history: anti-democratic currents need images of the enemy in order to exploit the fears of people for their political purposes. Hate crimes - up to racially motivated murders - are now part of the agenda in many countries.

It is the legacy of all the victims of the Holocaust, all the people murdered by the Nazis, which we must carry within us. We must pass on this legacy to future generations - with the many young people who are here today, I have no doubt that we will succeed. Today, we are challenged to take responsibility for democracy and the rule of law, for human rights and human dignity. Now, and in the future.

I therefore particularly welcome Reverend Jesse Jackson, who came here from New York to Auschwitz-Birkenau to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust with the Sinti and Roma. It will guide our view on a new, international and transatlantic perspective, and make clear that we must work together for global human rights and political and social justice.

The American civil rights movement, shaped by people like Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, and Reverend Jackson for many decades, was and is a role model for Sinti and Roma in Germany and Europe. Their achievements continue to be a source of hope for minorities worldwide who are still suffering from racism and exclusion, violence and persecution.

Today we appeal from this place, from the extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, to the representatives of the governments in Europe and to the world community, to outlaw racism in all its forms. We are dealing here with democracy as a whole, of which we are all part, no matter what language we speak, which main color or sexual orientation we have or which religion we feel we belong to. A democracy that, after the terrible experiences of the break of civilization, was a guarantee of peace and freedom for decades.

Finally, let me thank everyone who prepared and organized the memorial service, especially the staff of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and the many young people who support us here on a voluntary basis.

Thank you all.