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PLEASE NOTE: NEWS EMBARGO UNTIL FRIDAY 2.00 p.m.

Speech by Romani Rose to mark the signing of the collaboration agreement with the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) and the recognition of the IHRA's working definition of Antigyptism on 27 January 2023 at the BKA's headquarters in Berlin

Minister Faeser,
President Münch,
Dr Daimagüler,
Dr Klincke,
Mr Ziercke,
Dear BKA employees,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Mr Christian Pfeil,

It is certainly no exaggeration to call this day an "historic" one: The Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) and the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma are signing a joint agreement today on future collaboration against antigypsyism. This is a "radical change" in the way police authorities have dealt with our minority since 1945.

Together with the Central Council, the BKA will work to counteract any discrimination and exclusion of members of our minority, to raise awareness of and outlaw social antigypsyism. For this, I thank the BKA and all those involved in bringing about this collaboration agreement.

My special thanks go to you, dear President Münch, and also to your predecessor in office, Mr Ziercke, whose participation in today's event I am particularly pleased about. It is thanks to your commitment that we have set another milestone for our constitutional democracy in the important field of minority protection.

In order to effectively counteract antigypsyism, it is necessary to be clear about the manifestations of this specific form of racism directed against Sinti and Roma.

Antigyptism and antisemitism were not Nazi inventions. A prejudiced and hostile attitudes towards Sinti and Roma and towards Jews are deeply rooted in European history. Just like the Jewish minority, Sinti and Roma have always been misused by the authorities as scapegoats for social grievances and have been victims of attacks and pogroms.

The most radical form of antigypsyism was the racial ideology of the National Socialists, which led to the murder of 500,000 Sinti and Roma during the Holocaust. At the time, this was planned and organised in Berlin just as systematically as the genocide of the six million Jews.

With the working definition of Antigypsyism, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) - a respected international organisation in the field of Holocaust remembrance, education and research - has developed an instrument that helps to recognise antigypsyism and to create a common understanding of this phenomenon.

The IHRA's working definition forms the basis for the collaboration agreement we are signing today. By recognising IHRA's definition of antigypsyism, the BKA commits to developing and implementing specific measures to tackle antigypsyism.

Together with the BKA, we have therefore agreed that from now on, all employees of public authorities will receive further advanced training about the history of the German Sinti and Roma and about centuries of antigypsyism passed down through the generations.

The training will be developed and carried out by the Educational Forum against Antigypsyism. The Educational Forum is part of the Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma, our specialised academic institution in Heidelberg. The already established collaboration with the BKA academy is to be further consolidated within the framework of the study programme.

The officers are to be informed that Sinti and Roma have been German citizens for centuries and – just like Jews – felt it to be their natural patriotic duty to stand up for their country as soldiers.

During the Second World War, soldiers of our minority who fought on the front line – many of them highly decorated – were deported directly to Auschwitz. The High Command of the Wehrmacht had ordered the exclusion of Sinti and Roma from the armed forces for "racial reasons". After being registered by the "Rassenhygienische Forschungsstelle" (Research Office on Racial Hygiene) in Berlin, they were discharged from the Wehrmacht despite the intercession of their superiors and sent to the concentration and extermination camps.

From the autobiographical notes of the infamous camp commander of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höß, the following entry has survived (**and I quote**):

"In many cases they had arrested front-line soldiers on holiday who had high honours, who had been wounded several times, but whose father or mother or grandfather were Gypsies or Gypsy half-breeds." (**end of quote**)

The collaboration agreement being signed today is of great importance for our constitutional state.

The decade-long denial of the Nazi genocide of our minority was only officially recognised as genocide on racial grounds in 1982 by the then Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. In

consequence, no analysis and re-evaluation of the history of National Socialism in relation to our minority occurred in the first decades after the end of the war.

Instead, the former perpetrators determined the image of our minority in society and had the power of interpretation over the history of the persecution of Sinti and Roma by the Nazi state. This image was shaped in post-war society by an almost unbroken adoption of Nazi racial ideology, which ascribed negative characteristics to our minority just as it did to Jewish people.

Many perpetrators from the Nazi era continued to be employed in the German police apparatus after the war – also in the BKA – including former members of the SS, which meant that antigypsyist thought patterns were able to survive within the authorities for decades.

This had serious consequences, especially for the survivors of Nazi persecution: Often it was precisely those police officers who were personally involved in the persecution and deportation of Sinti and Roma who were called upon as expert witnesses in compensation proceedings and by the courts. In order to conceal their own crimes, they denied the racial persecution of Sinti and Roma under National Socialism and justified it as allegedly preventing crime.

In doing so, they rehabilitated themselves from their participation in these crimes. Sinti and Roma were thus denied recognition as victims of the Holocaust and systematically deprived of the compensation to which they were entitled.

These officials also continued to propagate a racist image of the enemy against our minority in public, which served, among other things, to justify the continued special registration of Sinti and Roma. Since this violated the constitution, the officials hid this practice under continuously new synonyms. At first they spoke of "rural travellers", later of "mobile ethnic minorities", abbreviated as "MEM", or even of "persons with frequently changing residence", abbreviated as "HWAO persons".

The continued stigmatisation has left the minority completely without a chance in the public eye and pushed them to the margins of society.

Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier described this continuity as a "second persecution" on the 10th anniversary of the handover of the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe Murdered under National Socialism in Berlin last October.

He went on to say (**and I quote**):

"In the name of our country, I ask you for forgiveness – for the immeasurable injustice done to the Roma of Europe by Germans during the National Socialist era, and for the disregard that German Sinti and Roma experienced after the end of the war, also in the Federal Republic." (**end of quote**)

Steinmeier was referring to the findings of the "Independent Commission on Antigypsyism" set up by the Federal Government in 2019, which had shown in detail in a study that to this

day there are multiple indications of continued and systematic discrimination against Sinti and Roma by the police.

The reappraisal of the "BKA history" was an important first step in enabling the federal and state police authorities to establish a new relationship with our minority. In a total of three comprehensive volumes, the continuities in the federal German police structures in the special registration of Sinti and Roma were traced and documented right up to the turf battles between the BKA and the Bavarian State Criminal Police Office.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, Mr Ziercke, once again for this initiative. At the time, despite reservations within your government agency, you did not allow yourself to be dissuaded from your plan. In doing so, you contributed towards strengthening the confidence of our minority in the state. The reappraisal of the "BKA history" was an important contribution towards ensuring that antigypsyism is outlawed in the future in the same way as anti-Semitism. For this, you deserve our respect.

It is important that this reappraisal is now also carried out at the level of the state criminal investigation offices and police headquarters comprehensively, without any loopholes and by independent historians.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A critical examination of the role of the police in the Nazi dictatorship as well as of the personnel and ideological continuities after 1945 does not mean that the police authorities today should be restricted in their work.

It is the task of the police to prevent and prosecute crimes and to protect the citizens of our country from resorting to crime or violence. This is an important principle of our state and fundamental to our social coexistence.

However, it must be noted that only the individual, without regard to the person, is held responsible for his or her actions. According to Article 3 of the Basic Law, no one may be disadvantaged or favoured because of his or her ancestry. This applies particularly to police investigative work.

However, we are repeatedly confronted with the fact that police authorities still explicitly refer to ancestry as an essential characteristic in the case of our minority. This invalidates a central principle of our democratic legal system for Sinti and Roma.

Dr Dieter Romann, President of the Federal Police, had therefore made it clear in a joint statement with the Central Council in August 2017, that **(and I quote)** the "citizenship of every citizen must not be called into question by making ancestry a criterion for police work." **(end of quote)**

Furthermore, mentioning an accused person's ancestry can contribute towards reinforcing the stigmatisation of the entire minority in society. For example, Leipzig's "Mitte" Studies from 2022 showed that close to 40 percent of German citizens reject Sinti and Roma as neighbours.

This is one of the reasons why top performers belonging to our minority do not acknowledge their affiliation, but seek protection from discrimination in anonymity.

Against the background of history, Sinti and Roma do not have special rights, but they do have the same rights, which are explicitly enshrined in the constitution.

With today's event, the BKA is sending a signal against exclusion and discrimination of Sinti and Roma that will also be noticed by the public.

Let me say it here to summarise: Despite all the deficits that still exist in the way our minority is treated, the Central Council believes that the Federal Republic of Germany is a democratic constitutional state.

As an advocacy group, we are committed to the preservation of this free basic order and the participation of Sinti and Roma as equal citizens of this country.

We have had 70 years of internal and external peace. This is based on common democratic values, the defence of which is also the task of our police authorities. The current developments in Germany, which are characterised by an increase in authoritarian ideologies and racist and violent extremism that pose a danger to our entire society, show that democracy must defend itself.

You, as representatives of our state, are often at the forefront of confrontations with extremists who oppose our democratic values: a task which is certainly not always easy and which deserves recognition.

In conclusion, I would therefore like to express my thanks and respect to all the officials present here today.

Thank you for your attention.