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EUROPEAN ROMA AND TRAVELLERS FORUM
EVROPAKO FORUMO E ROMENGO THAJ E PHIRUTNENGO
FORUM EUROPÉEN DES ROMS ET DES GENS DU VOYAGE

— PRESS RELEASE —

ERTF Commemorates the 75th anniversary of the genocide committed against Roma during the Second World War

Strasbourg, 2 August 2019: With a minute of silence at noon in front of the “Human Rights” sculpture in front of the Palais de l’Europe in Strasbourg, the ERTF remembered more than 3,000 Roma exterminated by the German Nazis during the night of 2-3 August 1944 in the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

“This is not just the commemoration of a past event. It is a wake-up call for what is awaiting us if we don’t act. Fascism, anti-Gypsyism and anti-Semitism are on the increase. I therefore call on the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Committee of Ministers to put back on their political agenda the raise of the anti-Gypsyism and the anti-Semitism and consider new and effective approaches on how to intervene and combat an national/member state level these frightening phenomena, which is no longer transmitted secretly but openly and loudly.” said the **President of the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF), Miranda Vuolasranta**, in her speech at the official commemoration ceremony to mark the European Roma Holocaust Memorial day, organised by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

But this Remembrance Day should not only commemorate those who died in this awful tragedy. In a global context in which our organisation is witnessing every day the rise of fear and hatred of others, translating into anti-Semitism, anti-Gypsyism, homophobia, transphobia, and other discriminatory behaviours, the struggle against amnesia and oblivion should not stop.

The silent acceptance of racism and the increase of far-right political parties in power in the member states, governments, ministries, parliaments, and other decision-making institutions is a tendency to direct frustration to the weakest population.

The European Parliament, the European Commission and other International organisations and foundations are granting millions of euros to mainly non-Roma actors, for programs and inclusion measures that never end even near any Roma in need but are being used mainly to maintain paper production activity called “Reports”. Unfortunately, the Council of Europe has become one of these sources, dropping out the Roma actors and becoming a user of these resources for its own activities and benefit.

The European Parliament and Commission in Brussels are treating few local Brussels based NGOs, as the representatives of all 12 million European Roma, ignoring the international Roma NGOs, who’s representatives are being nominated/elected to represent their communities. **Is it right for the EU Institutions to unilaterally choose who speaks on behalf of the Roma community?** Consultation on Roma issues at the EU Commission level is limited to those few local NGO who are influential in Brussels, and those who cannot afford to travel to Brussels at

their own expense are left out without any possibility for participation. Romani activists are not rich and influential! Democracy does not work in that way that the weak must boost up themselves, but the other way around, the strong support the weak once.

The European Institutions allow American private parties to define Roma policies within closed political circles. **Where is the rule of law and the basis of democracy then?** International Roma organizations have been pushed out of any processes concerning their situation and left without any financial support and access to decision-making. The ERTF calls on the Romani people to wake up and defend European and Roma and principles that have formed the basis of our democracy and the rule of law.

The ERTF call on the Council of Europe, the European Commission and the United Nations to work together with the Romani representatives on establishing a Roma Ombudsman, a proposal that was recently introduced by the **International Romani Union**. The Romani ombudsman will work towards increasing the trust between the community and the institutions / citizens and will protect and improve the rights of the Roma. The Initiative for establishing an independent body and contact point - Romani Ombudsman - the Roma Ombudsman is a result of discrimination and other serious human rights abuses against Roma which, unfortunately, at the moment no government can guarantee full protection of the human rights of the Roma people.

Mr Patrick Modiano, a Nobel Prize winner, said "*the vocation of the novelist, when faced with this large blank page of oblivion, to make a few faded words visible again, like lost icebergs adrift on the surface of the ocean*". Likewise, it is the vocation of the states to protect our societies from oblivion, to remind us of the human rights of minorities, and ensure the security of all citizens, regardless of their ethnicity, religion or belief, disability, sexual orientation, gender expression and/or gender identity.

We therefore call on national governments as well as inter-governmental organisations, civil society organisations and individuals to join this struggle, to act and react to defend human rights and the values of democracy.