

## Roma Holocaust/Pharraimos Remembrance Day

### REMEMBERING THE FORGOTTEN VOICES OF THE HOLOCAUST

Roma Holocaust/Pharraimos Remembrance Day – 2 August.



Romani woman (prisoner no. Z-63598), imprisoned October 1, 1943. The letter 'Z' stands for 'Zigeuner' or Gypsy. [Auschwitz Memorial Archives.]

### Background

The Roma Holocaust/Pharraimos Remembrance Day was first suggested by the Roma National Congress and the International Romani Union at a "Hearing" of the Council of Europe's European Roma and Travellers Forum, in Strasbourg, 2009.

The suggestion was adopted by all participants at the event "Together against the anti-Gypsyism in Europe". They proposed that Roma, Sinti, Gypsies and Travellers should take to the streets to light candles and pray in public for those murdered by the Nazi regime. This day is also to stand in solidarity with Roma, Sinti, Gypsy and Travellers who continue to suffer abuse, persecution and sometimes fatal violence towards them in Europe today.

### Genocide

An estimated 11 million people were murdered in the Holocaust during the Second World War because of their nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, religious belief, political affiliation or because they were prisoners of war. The largest single group of people to be murdered during the Holocaust were 6 million Jews.

It is estimated that between 400,000 and 500,000 Roma and Sinti were massacred by the Third Reich.



Throughout German-occupied Europe, Roma were interned, and then deported to slave-labour and death camps. The existence of the Roma was also seen as a threat to "Aryan" blood purity. Hundreds of thousands of Roma were killed by SS and police units in the East; more were deported and killed in camps.

At Birkenau, a special camp was built to house Roma inmates, where they continued to live in family units. Roma children were subjected to brutal and inhumane "medical experiments" by Dr. Mengele and his staff. On August 2, 1944, the Gypsy camp at Auschwitz was "liquidated". All its men, women, and children were sent to the gas chambers.

## Justice

During the Nuremberg Trials, no mention was made of this genocide and no assistance or compensation was given to Roma who had survived the concentration camps.

The genocide of Roma and Sinti was denied for decades. In former places of persecution, memorials and commemorations the genocide of Roma and Sinti has been a footnote.



**Roma activists at the beginning of the hunger strike Easter 1980 in Dachau concentration camp.**

Romani Rose, a Roma activist, organised and participated in a hunger strike in a former concentration camp, Dachau, in Easter 1980. This was to bring international attention to the genocide and to protest against the continued use of “Gypsy-Race” files by German police and other authorities decades after the war. 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.



**A memorial to Romani Holocaust victims stands near the site of the former concentration camp at Lety, now in the Czech Republic.**

### **Roma rights activists continue to struggle for recognition of the genocide of Roma and Sinti.**

At the former concentration camp of Lety stands a pig farm. Back in 2005, the Czech Republic was singled out in a European Parliament resolution for failing to remove the pig farm at the site and create “a graceful memorial” to honor victims of the Romani Holocaust. But each government has either called for the issue to be studied further or said there was a lack of funds to do so.

The struggle continues.