

August 2 2017,

The Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau  
Prime Minister of Canada  
House of Commons! Ottawa  
ON K1A 0A6

### Canadians Call for Official Recognition of the Roma Genocide

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

We write to you today to reiterate our request for the official recognition of the Genocide of Roma and Sinti ('Porrajmos') which occurred during Nazi occupation of Europe in World War II.

In addition to committing genocide against the Jews, the Nazis committed genocide against the Roma and Sinti. On August 2nd 1944, the remaining 2897 Roma and Sinti men, women, elderly and children imprisoned in the Zigeunerlager ("Gypsy Camp") were murdered in the gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau. According to the most recent estimates, between 500,000 and 1,000,000 Roma and Sinti were murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators. For this reason, the international Roma community has designated August 2 as the day to commemorate the Roma and Sinti Porrajmos.

Given the Nazi ideology of "racial purity", Roma and Sinti were among the first victims. With Hitler's rise to power in 1933, anti-Roma laws proliferated. The Nuremberg Laws directly targeted Jews and were extended to include "Gypsies, Negroes and their bastard offspring" in late 1935. In 1936 the Racial Hygiene and Demographic Biology Research Unit was established under the supervision of Dr. Robert Ritter. Soon after, the first Roma ghettos were established and Roma and Sinti deportations to concentration camps began.

Despite this history, the Porrajmos, which is often referred to as the "Forgotten Holocaust", remains widely unrecognised by governments around the world. After the war, scant political and academic attention was paid to the fate suffered by the Roma and Sinti. During the Nuremberg trials, there was seldom mention of the mass murders of Roma and Sinti, and Roma witnesses were not invited to testify.

Only in April 2015 did the European Parliament finally adopt a resolution recognizing the historical fact of the Porrajmos. The resolution declared "that a European day should be dedicated to commemorating the victims of the genocide of the Roma during World War II". It states, furthermore, "the need to combat Antigypsyism at every level and by every means, and stresses that this phenomenon is an especially persistent, violent, recurrent and commonplace form of racism".

Romanipe invites the Canadian government to follow the example of the European Parliament and to formally recognise the Porrajmos. This recognition would grant legal and moral legitimacy to the Roma and Sinti, allowing them to be rightfully integrated into the history of the Holocaust and included in all official ceremonies, commemorations and events that honour the victims of World War II.

Our inability to recognise the Roma Genocide continues to normalize hate and discrimination against these peoples today. Last year, a monument dedicated to the Roma and Sinti victims was tragically vandalized in Berlin. Events like these signal the need to change perceptions and attitudes toward Roma

and Sinti, in order to build a culture of understanding and acceptance rather than one of hate. In your note left in the book of remembrance at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, you mentioned the importance of remembering this painful part of our history, and our commitment to never again allow such darkness to prevail. The lack of indignation at the recent killings of Roma by far-right extremists speaks to the very real dangers and consequences of forgetting the past.

This is why we ask the Canadian government to respect its commitment to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance and its aim of recognising the Genocide of the Roma. . Officially recognising August 2 as the day of memory dedicated to the Porrajmos ensures that the right to remembrance of Roma communities is respected and that the untold stories of Roma and Sinti victims and survivors are honoured. Such recognition also serves to delegitimize current hate and violence, and acknowledges the fact that Roma and Sinti communities still suffer from discrimination and persecution.

We invite your government to make a statement that draws attention to the plight of Roma and Sinti during the Holocaust and to mark this solemn occasion on August 2 this year.

Signatories:

Romanipe, Montreal Holocaust Museum, Hoodstock Montreal , Communication, Ouverture, Rapprochement Interculturel (C.O.R.), Toronto Roma Community Centre (RCC), World Romani Dialects Translation Bureau, Romani Criss, TernYpe International Roma Youth Network, Phiren Amenca International Network, La voix des Rroms, European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), Armenian National Committee of Canada (ANCC), Irwin Cotler Founder of Raoul Wallenberg Centre For Human Rights, Professor Nandini Ramanujam, McGill Centre for Human Rights, Faculty of Law, François Crépeau, Professor, McGill University, Amnesty International Canada (English Branch) Amnistie Internationale (Francophone), Freeman Family Foundation Holocaust Education Centre of the Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada, Manitoba Multifaith Council, Rev. Dr. James Christie Director, Ridd Institute for Religion and Global Policy, Centre Khemara, Alliance Genocide Awareness and Remembrance (AGAR), European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network (ERGO), The Azrieli Foundation.

Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, Deputy Gouin, Québec Solidaire.

Members of Parliament:

Elizabeth May, MP of Saanich - Gulf Islands, Leader of the Green Party of Canada

Hélène Laverdière, Laurier - Sainte-Marie

Alexandre Boulerice, Rosemont-La Petite-Patrie

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Anthony Housefather- Mount-Royal