



An Open Letter To Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

July 18, 2016

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

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

[Romanipe](#) is an established Non-for-Profit organization based in Montreal since April 19th 2013. Its main mission is to fight discrimination against Roma in Canada as well as abroad. The end goal of our organization is to address the human rights abuses which Roma face around the world and to break the stereotypes, which are unfortunately still present today. Fighting racism and securing rights for Roma refugees to Canada is an important objective for us.

This past Monday, accompanied by Canadian Holocaust survivors, your government rightfully paid a visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and underscored the importance of remembrance.

Although Romanipe welcomes this important initiative, we would like to take this opportunity to bring to your attention the often forgotten plight of Roma during the Holocaust and likewise express our concern over the failure to include Roma survivors in this endeavour.

On August 2nd 1944, the last remaining 2897 Roma and Sinti, including the elderly and children, imprisoned in the so-called Zigeunerlager or “Gypsy Camp” were murdered in the gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau. By latest estimates, at least half the entire Roma and Sinti population of European Roma amounting to an estimated 500 000 Roma were killed by the Nazis and their collaborators during World War II.

Given the Nazi ideology for “racial purity”, the Roma were among their first victims. With the rise of Hitler to power in 1933 and following the Nazi ideology of “racial purity”, the anti-Roma laws proliferated. The Nuremberg Laws, which passed in 1935 and targeted the Jews directly, were extended to include “Gypsies, Negroes and their bastard offspring” in late 1935. As of 1936, the Racial Hygiene and Demographic Biology Research Unit was established under the supervision of Dr. Robert Ritter. Soon after the first Roma ghettos and deportation to labour camps begun. ([Ternype International Roma Youth Network](#))

Yet until this day, the fate of the Roma under the Nazi Regime remains largely unrecognized. The Roma Genocide has often been referred to as the “forgotten Holocaust” which still seems valid today. After the war, hardly any attention has been paid to the fate of the Roma and Sinti during WWII, neither by scholars nor by governments. During the Nuremberg trials there was not a single Roma witness and the Roma mass murders were only mentioned marginally.

For the past three years, Romanipe has worked in collaboration with Ternype, an International Roma Youth Network which has actively been working toward the official recognition of August 2nd as Roma Holocaust Memorial Day. It pays homage to the victims, heroes, survivors, and strengthens our identity based on deep knowledge of the past. Every year, for the past six years, on August 2nd, the Ternype Network has been organizing an International Roma Remembrance Initiative in memory of the Roma Genocide.

This event gathers young Roma and non-Roma from across Europe in Krakow and Auschwitz-Birkenau in a unique youth event: “Dikh he na bister” (Look and don’t forget). The Roma Genocide Remembrance Initiative aims to raise awareness among young Europeans, civil society and decision-makers about the Roma Genocide. Likewise, it outlines the mechanisms of antigypsyism in a challenging context of rising racism, hate speech and extremism in Europe.

Romanipe has participated and contributed to this event for two consecutive years. Recognition of the Roma Genocide has become an essential objective for us. We have since been actively working towards obtaining official recognition of the Roma Genocide by the Canadian Government, an effort initiated by Canadian Roma civil society (Roma Community Centre) since 2013. An effort that has unfortunately been denied by the previous government.

Earlier this year, the monument dedicated to the Roma victims of the Holocaust was tragically vandalized. This tells us that more work needs to be done to change perceptions and attitudes, in order to build a culture of understanding and acceptance, and not one of hate. In your note left in the books of humanity at the 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 Roma Genocide is one which was and remains largely forgotten. With the growing influence of Neo-Nazi movements taking place throughout Europe, we have recently witnessed the very dangers and consequence of forgetting the past. In current day Europe, growing Anti-Gypsyism has led to the racially motivated killings of Roma by far-right extremists. Such widespread hatred and violence against Roma would not be allowed today had the history of the Roma Genocide been rightfully recognized and taught.

It is for this reason that we ask the Canadian government to demonstrate its commitment to the memory of the Holocaust and officially recognize August 2nd as the official day dedicated to the memory of the Roma Genocide.

As a young Canadian Roma myself, visiting the Auschwitz Museum three years ago was a pivotal and turning point in my life, changing and altering my world view. I felt a sudden albeit familiar consciousness, an awareness of all the lives that had been lost here, including thousands of my own. The plight the Roma faced there, alongside many others, has been hidden for far too many years and clear light must finally be shed on this.

We would also invite your current government to make a statement to mark and draw attention to the plight of Roma during the Holocaust to mark the occasion of August 2nd this year.

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