

**The Address by Michal Mižigár,  
representative of the Roma community,  
On the Day of Holocaust Remembrance and Prevention of Crimes Against Humanity  
Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic,  
January 26, 2024**

1. - Aušvicate hi kher báro      / There is a big barrack in Auschwitz  
odoj bešel mro piráno      / where my beloved is sitting,  
bešel, bešel, gondolinel      / sitting in prison and thinking,  
the pre mande pobisterel.      / thinking of me.

3. - Ó, tu kálo čiriklóro      / Little black bird,  
ľidža mange mro lilóro,      / take my letter  
ľidža, ľidža mra romňake      / to my wife  
hoj som phandlo Aušvicate.      / let her know I am in jail in Auswitz

4. - Aušvicate bokha báre,      / There is a great hunger in Auswitz  
a so te chal amen náne,      / there is nothing to eat  
aňi oda koter máro,      / not even a piece of bread  
o blokáris bibachtálo.      / and the guard is evil.

Ladies and gentlemen, honored guests,

If I possessed the ability to sing, I would have chosen to sing these poignant verses from the song „Aušvicate hi kher báro," crafted by Růžena Danielová of Mutěnice. Mrs. Růžena Danielová, identified as prisoner Z-8259, hailed from a community of indigenous Moravian Roma, steadfast in their integration into society. Regrettably, she returned solitary, as her husband and five children met their tragic fate in Auschwitz. This mournful composition, after which Dušan Holý named monograph in the book of the same title, stands as a poignant symbol of Romani suffering resonating within Romani communities across Europe even in the present day. It is disheartening, however, that despite the passage of 79 years since the liberation of Auschwitz, this song remains largely unrecognized, absent from the discourse of historians, academia, and other forums dedicated to the discussion of Auschwitz and the Holocaust at large. Nevertheless, in a profound testament to the enduring power of this musical elegy, it will finally, for the first time, find its resonance within the hallowed halls of the United Nations building on the occasion of the upcoming International Holocaust Memorial Day. After nearly eight decades, the haunting melody and profound lyrics will echo through a space that transcends borders, bringing the Romani narrative into the forefront of global remembrance and recognition.

Even though my Eastern Slovakian ancestors were spared the horrors of outright genocide, they became victims of relentless persecution and the imposition of racist laws by the Slovak state. Stripped of their basic rights, they faced the cruel reality of losing ownership of their homes. Forced to live in the shadows, they were confined to spaces within a 2 km radius from the main road, their movements restricted to the whims of discriminatory regulations. The simple act of venturing into the village became a clandestine endeavour, permitted only during specific, prescribed times. In this tumultuous chapter of their lives, they grappled not only with the physical constraints imposed upon them but also with the profound emotional toll of systemic injustice. Post-war, my ancestors were coerced into

labor by German soldiers, digging trenches against the Red Army. Enduring the harsh conditions of forests—cold, hunger, disease, and fear—they faced vengeful threats from the Hlinka Guard. Only through ties to the parish priest or mayor were their lives spared. The aftermath of World War II shattered the Roma community, extinguishing progress in their societal integration and leaving them with nothing, including what little they had before.

Surviving Roma and Sinti faced even greater challenges upon returning from concentration camps, often as solitary individuals, having lost most of their relatives—just like the above mentioned Růžena Danielova. Returning to Bohemia and Moravia, they encountered unwelcome receptions and lacked the means to rebuild their lives. Remarkably, the state has yet to provide compensation for the property they lost during World War II. The pain inflicted upon these Roma and Sinti was compounded by the fact that the atrocities were committed not by Germans but by Czech individuals serving as gendarmes in concentration camps within the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. After war, shockingly, none of them faced consequences for the atrocities inflicted upon Roma and Sinti prisoners, regardless of age.

Less than 600 survivors emerged from the original 6,500 Roma and Sinti, marking not only the genocide of a specific Roma sub-ethnic group but also the loss of Czechoslovak citizens who called Bohemia and Moravia home. The Holocaust of the Czech and Moravian Roma and Sinti was also carried out with the help of Act No. 117 of 1927, known as the Law on Wandering Gypsies, which was signed by President Masaryk. This legislation not only criminalized Roma from the age of 14 but also mandated the collection of data on the Roma, later used against them.

Looking at the present, one positive development in our country is the closure of the pig farm at Lety u Písku. This site, where a concentration camp for Romani people stood since August 1942, serves as a poignant reminder. Lety, along with the camp in Hodonín near Kunštát, acted as a transfer point to Auschwitz, leading to the tragic fate of many who never returned. As noted earlier, only around 600 individuals managed to survive.

The Museum of Romani Culture is set to unveil a new memorial in Lety u Písku later this year—a cause for great satisfaction. The acknowledgment of this historical site is especially poignant considering the Holocaust of the Roma and Sinti was, at times, downplayed or denied, even by the highest political representatives of our country. Heartfelt thanks to all involved in removing the pig farm, including the late Mr. Čeněk Ružička, the Museum of Romani Culture, and the impassioned protestors who conveyed to society that such disregard was not acceptable.

My generation and I were fortunate to hear firsthand accounts from Holocaust survivors or receive narratives from our post-war grandparents who, as children, experienced those times. Now, the pressing question is how we will convey these stories to the generations that follow us. During this reflection, we confront the initial challenges. The Romani Holocaust was initially overlooked for an extended period, later subjected to widespread doubt, and, regrettably, anti-Romani sentiment, akin to the racism of that era, persists to this day. The current omnipresence of Antigypsyism highlights the ongoing struggles faced by the Romani and Sinti communities, emphasizing the need for collective remembrance and a commitment to combating discrimination in our contemporary society.

Regardless of who we are as people and what we have achieved, we still face racism from ordinary people in mainstream society. To be specific, our children in kindergarten already experience the unpleasant encounter of coming home crying that they are Gypsies. Generations of our children have been educated in special schools and now in segregated schools, or at best in segregated classes in inclusive schools where Roma children are taught according to the curriculum for children with light mental disability. The nice teachers tell the Roma parents that they don't have to learn the hard stuff,

but in return they can draw more and sing more, but they don't tell them that they are creating another generation of Roma without education who will have no place in society. It is still the case here that Roma men and women who now have a university diploma were at risk of special schooling had it not been for instructed parents, their neighbors or non-Roma friends. This nice drawing and singing at school is robbing these children of their chances and preparing them as the next generation for poverty and the clutches of the poverty merchants, from which there is no easy way out in this country.

The society is fundamentally betraying itself by perpetuating the marginalization of Romani people, who constitute the youngest population in today's aging Europe. Each year, we squander the potential of thousands of young Roma and Sinti who could have made substantial contributions to society. This betrayal is not confined to one country but is a collective failing of all nations that engage in the injustice of segregating these young minds in education. The loss is not only theirs but also a collective one, as society misses out on the diverse talents and perspectives they could bring to the table.

Even those of us who successfully graduate and integrate into society are not spared from the daily burden of insinuations about our Romani identity. A poignant example is my close friend who, after completing the police academy and working as a police officer in a certain town, eventually left the profession due to the unbearable environment. In his own words: "Every morning, before my shift started on duty, even though they knew I was Roma, they would exchange disgusting remarks about Gypsies. I took it up with my supervisor, and he told me to be more of a policeman than a Roma." This account is just one illustration of the pervasive challenges faced in everyday life.

Romani people today harbor a deep skepticism that anyone will address the pervasive injustice they face. The current anti-discrimination laws fall short of addressing the specific challenges faced by the Roma community. To rectify this, racism against Roma must be treated with the severity it deserves and should be condemned akin to the way anti-Semitism is.

Only when racism against the Roma is taken seriously can we truly say that we have learned from history. It should not be a tolerated part of political culture, nor should celebrities perpetuate ridicule on television programs. In schools, Roma children should not be taught that they are exotic and their culture is different. Furthermore, racially motivated murders of Roma individuals must be recognized as such.

I personally experienced the repercussions of such racial violence during my childhood, with the tragic killing of Tibor Danihel in our town of Písek. When Roma people feared walking down the street in broad daylight, they had to protect themselves. Unfortunately, since November '89, in the Czech Republic, when Romani people lost several tens of their lives due to their origins, the state has often turned a blind eye. This indifference has led many to emigrate to the United Kingdom and other western countries since 1997, where they continue to reside today.

In conclusion, I appeal to legislators and politicians to prioritize the adoption of a clear and explicit definition of Antigypsyism, addressing racism against Roma and Sinti and consider it a crime.

The Czech Government's adoption of a clear definition of Antigypsyism is necessary to promote social cohesion and address systemic discrimination against the Romani community. A precisely defined concept will provide a basis for recognizing and combating anti-Roma prejudice, while ensuring legal clarity and promoting inclusion. By officially recognizing Antigypsyism, the government can take proactive measures to challenge stereotypes, improve education, and implement policies that promote equal opportunities for all citizens, thus contributing to a more tolerant and just society.

Ladies and gentlemen, when Antigypsyism, or racism against Romani people, is treated with the same seriousness as anti-Semitism, I can participate in these gatherings, much like I am doing today, with the assurance that we have gleaned important lessons. It is my hope that when politicians lay wreaths, their words „so that this will never happen again" truly reflect a commitment to preventing the recurrence of such atrocities.