

**The Address of Čeněk Růžička  
President of the Committee for Redress of Roma Holocaust  
on the occasion of  
The Day of Commemoration in Memory of Victims of the Holocaust  
and Prevention of Crimes Against Humanity  
Senate of the Czech Parliament  
January 27, 2021**

Dear fellow citizens,

It is my honor to be able to stand in front of you at this difficult time and say a few words to you on this memorable day. Allow me to take this opportunity and address my cordial greeting to all of you.

I represent the Romani minority, namely the Romani prisoners of the Nazi concentration camps and the relatives of the victims, so it behooves me to briefly assess the previous period in relation to the Romani victims of Nazism.

I will pragmatically mention only two projects from many others, thanks to which our organization, with the help of people of discernment of this and of foreign society, and with the help of Jewish organizations, has recently achieved relatively acceptable results. Nonetheless, to get to the current state encompassed overcoming quite a rigmarole.

The "project" I have in mind was a state buying of the pig farm, which was established in the place of a former Romani concentration camp in Lety u Písku. The process triggered a greater interest of institutions and the general public in non-manipulated information.

In this context, I would like to emphasize the complaisance of the Ministers of the former Czech Government lead by PM Sobotka, who relieved us as a nation of an outrageous shame. This year, the buildings of the pig farm will be demolished. The demolition will be carried out with a governmental support. The architectural design for the arrangement of this commemorative site reminding of the concentration camp has already been selected. The site shall open to visitors in 3 years.

In Prague, a long-term wish of mine is coming true. In 2023, with the support of the Norwegian Funds and the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, an institution called "The Centre of Roma and Sinti in Prague" will be established. The Centre will be a place for social and cultural activities, where Romani, Sinti and all other interested people will be meeting. It will be a place for educational events. These events will be aimed at strengthening of long-term relationships between the general society and our people.

There is one more issue I need to mention here: With the help of the then Foreign Minister, Mr. Lubomír Zaorálek, we managed to negotiate at the German Ministry of Finance and to arrange financial compensation for the Roma people, the victims of the war, who suffered during WWII for racial reasons. I am somewhat reserved towards the German side in this respect. Even this type of compensation did not go as it should have. When it comes to compensation of Roma people, I am critical of German, Swiss as well as Czech institutions. There is not enough space for me here to enumerate the compensation processes in which Romani prisoners of concentration camps and those who managed to hide under unimaginably harsh living conditions were sidelined. Despite the fact that in history, but even today, the destinies of the Jewish people intersected and still intersect in many negative aspects with the Romani people no one should acquire the right to

minimize the tragic fate of Roma families during the Nazi era. It is an attitude that belittles the suffering of the Roma people and a deeply amoral attitude that is always met with incomprehension. I have my reasons for this attitude.

The 6,000 lives of protectorate Roma and Sinti, former Czechoslovak citizens, who were murdered in concentration camps in years 1938-1945, can never be fully compensated. The murder of entire Roma families and their children, who had lived in the Czech lands for centuries, represents an irreplaceable loss for the entire Czech society. The consequences of this tragedy for several hundred of those who survived the persecution can only be approached. The survivors were often the only or one of a handful of individuals who survived the war, not only as far as their own family was concerned, but entire individual pre-war local communities. They had no one to support them, not even the nation they were part of. After the war, they stood on the threshold of a new era, alone, with lifelong undermined health, with incredible psychological traumas. Moreover, without any financial means, without a home. They had to rebuild their lives and their social environment from scratch. New families and communities, based on the remnants of the pre-war times, were created in the shadow of their terrible experiences, which they were afraid to talk about publicly, in an environment that was, and still is, stigmatizing. In their joint meetings a deep grief over the violent loss of native families and their loved ones is often demonstrated. Their war traumas strongly affected the lives of us, the post-war children, from whom, moreover, often the details of the suffering experienced and the context of the disappearance of their relatives, were kept secret. We often could not share their fate. They would not want to talk about their suffering as they considered it as a way of their as well as our protection.

This is the reason why I am entitled to ask that we be invited to negotiate at all further compensation and redress talks.

To conclude, I would like to remind you of a sentence from a speech given by a German politician, the head of the Central Council of Sinti and Roma in Germany, Mr. Romani Ros, who said these words on the occasion of the Romani Holocaust Day in 2019:

"It's high time for the society to condemn the anti-Gypsyism exactly the same way the anti-Semitism was condemned."

And, I would like to add: "anti-Gypsyism condemned not only by words, but mainly by actions."

Ladies and gentlemen allow me to express my sincere thanks to the organizers for the possibility to address you these days and I am looking forward to meeting you at a slightly better time.

Hořice, 15 January 2021

Čeněk Růžička