

## Jana Horváthová, Museum of Romani Culture, Brno, Czech Republic

Dear Ladies, Dear Gentlemen,

Two weeks ago we were commemorating Roma Holocaust Memorial Day and the destruction of those imprisoned in what was called the “Gypsy Camp” at the Auschwitz II-Birkenau Concentration Camp. Today we are commemorating what preceded that tragic story for Romani people from our country. It has been 78 years since the Romani prisoners were transported from here *en masse* to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Most of them perished there. As much as 90 % of the indigenous population of Romani people on our territory were murdered during the war.

Be that as it may, this fact is not yet sufficiently known in the Czech Republic. A large part of the public in our country is influenced by a stereotypical view of Romani people. How those people see the past that the Romani people in our country - or rather, in the former Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia - were forced to live through is distorted by the negative stereotypes they hold. The racially-motivated reasons for this suffering, for the genocide perpetrated against the Roma during the Second World War, are pushed into the background. The attempt by some groups from among the Jewish communities to limit the term “Holocaust” just to refer to the Jewish victims of these events – although it has been documented, on the basis of scholarly research, that Jews and Roma were connected during the war exactly by the genocide waged against each of them by the Nazis for racial reasons – this attempt is not helpful. It is education that is the most appropriate solution to these problems. That means the education especially of the youngest generation, the children and young people in compulsory schooling. The Czech Republic has ground to make up here, as children learn very little about the history of Romani people in the education system, and they generally learn very little about Romani people at all. Ignorance provides the best spawning ground for mythology. The Museum of Romani Culture is initiating a change in this situation.

Annually the museum is organizing multiple events commemorating the Holocaust and its Romani victims. The subject of the Holocaust of the Roma and Sinti - or as it is called in the Romanes language, *Le Romengero murdaripen andro dujto báro mariben* – has

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always been one of our institution's central themes, an institution that has the culture and the history of the Roma as a nation of the world at the exact center of its interest. Since 2018, the care and efforts to preserve the memory of these horrible events has intensified at our institution quite significantly; that was the year when the museum received the responsibility for both of locations where the genocide of the Roma during the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia had begun, i.e., Hodonín and Lety, places where the concentration camps for what were called "gypsies and gypsy half-breeds" or "persons living the gypsy way of life" were in operation. We opened the local memorial here to the public in August 2019, and more than a month ago we opened our new permanent exhibition here.

At Lety we are going to build a memorial to house an exhibition that will be financed, together with the Czech contribution, by the EEA Norway Grants through a predefined project. Before that, though, the pig farm at that location will be demolished. Its installation there was an embarrassment to our country and the Government of the Czech Republic finally decided to spend no small amount of money exactly in order to demolish it. The subsequent construction of a new memorial should be completed during 2023, when we plan to open the entire facility to the public.

Currently, also with aid from the Norwegian side, or rather, Norway Grants, we are building the museum's new, specialized workplace in our capital, the Center for the Roma and Sinti. The building for the planned Center is a functionalist villa, originally owned by members of the Jewish community, and it will soon undergo reconstruction and adaptation for the Center's purposes – we are planning to open it to the public in 2023 as well. The Center's main purpose is to also provide an opportunity in the capital for people to learn about the Holocaust of the Roma and Sinti, as well as to facilitate gatherings among people from these communities. After all, the idea to build the Center was advocated for in the Czech public space exactly by a representative of the Czech Roma, Čeněk Růžička, chair of the Committee for the Redress of the Roma Holocaust. The museum has been intensively collaborating with him and with other Roma and Sinti community representatives on these tasks. Together we are striving to restore the heretofore ignored or displaced subject of the Holocaust of the Roma and Sinti as part of our considerations and reflections, and we do so not just so this memory will be preserved, but also so self-reflection can become a healing component of the history of

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the world. We do this to contribute to the development of democracy and of an objective perspective on the ethnic Roma of the world.

Jana Horváthová, Museum of Romani Culture, Brno, Czech Republic

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## Radovan Krhovský, head of the Hodonín Memorial

Hello,

This year, for the first time ever, we are able to commemorate the tragic fate of the Czech and Moravian Roma during the Second World War here at the finished memorial. About a month ago, after many years of effort, we ceremonially opened the permanent exhibition about the history of this place and especially about the phase of what was called the "Gypsy Camp" that was in operation here from 1942 to 1943.

Those of us who work here at the Hodonín Memorial are quite glad the exhibition is finished, and we also hope it will be a dignified reminder of what happened here during the war.

Roughly 12 years ago, I paid visits to many places associated with the Holocaust, especially the extermination camps of Belzec, Sobibór, Treblinka, Chelmno and Majdanek. It ought to be mentioned that most of those sites, at that time, did not feature exhibitions that would have corresponded to their significance. Sobibór and Treblinka especially disappointed me, as the exhibitions there were very limited, and they were located in buildings that were old and small. Since then, changes have been made to a great degree – Sobibór by now has a new exhibition in a new building, Majdanek has a new visitors' center, and at Treblinka they are considering the construction of a new information center. Those are steps in the right direction.

Here at Hodonín, we are quite glad about the exhibition we have installed and that we can finally begin fully dedicating ourselves to the work we are here to do – commemorating the forgotten Holocaust and its Romani victims, as well as the other phases that this camp underwent. However, our work will not just be about commemorating, but it will also be about our small contribution to combating racism, totalitarianism and xenophobia. That is the basis of such things never repeating themselves again. Although we are just able to contribute quite a small proportion of such work, we will be glad if it succeeds. Time will tell.

Radovan Krhovský, head of the Hodonín Memorial

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## **Anna Míšková, Historian of Museum of Romani Culture, Brno, Czech Republic**

Dear Ladies, Dear Gentlemen, Dear Guests and Colleagues,

Today is almost exactly 78 years to the day from the large-scale transport of Romani prisoners from what was called the "Gypsy Camp" at Hodonín u Kunštátu, where we find ourselves right now. In that transport, which took place during the late night hours of 21 August and early morning hours of 22 August 1943, 749 Romani children, men and women were sent against their will to an all but certain death in the Auschwitz II-Birkenau Concentration and Extermination Camp – the youngest girl to be sent there had been born on 18 April 1943 and was just four months old at the time. In Brno, 18 more Romani prisoners were added to the transport train.

On 10 July 1942, an order was issued on the "elimination of the gypsy nuisance", which newly determined the clearly racial, anti-"Gypsy" direction of policy in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. On the basis of that order, on 2 August 1942 a quite precise, compulsory head count was done of those called "Gypsies and Gypsy half-breeds" in the Protectorate. Many families were sent directly from that count to what were called "Gypsy Camps" that had newly opened, one in Bohemia at Lety u Písku and the other right here at Hodonín u Kunštátu in Moravia. During the camp's first few days, its capacity was exceeded many times over. In a camp for approximately 300 people there were suddenly more than 1 200, not quite 400 of whom were children under 10. Upon arrival all were assigned their places during a humiliating process involving delousing and head shaving. The men were given official clothes to wear while the children and women were allowed to wear their own clothing, but all of their property and valuables were confiscated. There were no facilities for personal hygiene here, there was not enough medical care, there was not enough food, and the prisoners also suffered from a lack of water, both to drink and to use in other ways, while their barracks were insect-ridden and overcrowded. As a consequence of these shocking conditions, at the close of 1942 and the beginning of 1943 an epidemic of typhus broke out in the camp, including typhoid fever. The camp was quarantined as of 17 February 1943. All persons older than 10 were forced to work, whether in the quarry, on road construction, or inside

the camp itself. They worked every day, approximately 10 to 12 hours, seven days a week. All of these aspects resulted in high mortality among the prisoners, mainly those who were children. They were first buried in Černovice, at the cemetery for the parish, but because of the epidemic and the high number of corpses, a mass grave was set up near the camp at a location now called Žalov ("grief").

During the time that the "Gypsy Camp" at Hodonín u Kunštátu was in operation, approximately 1 396 people passed through it, of whom approximately 207 died here. During the Nazi persecution, 90 % of the indigenous Roma on the territory of this part of the former Czechoslovakia were murdered. Of the original population of approximately 6 500 Romani people, no more than 600 returned to this territory. According to estimates, the genocide claimed the lives of between 300 000 and 500 000 European Roma.

Anna Míšková, Historian of Museum of Romani Culture, Brno, Czech Republic

## **Message from the Governor to the Commemorative Gathering to Honor the Memory of the Holocaust of the Roma and Sinti (Hodonín u Kunštátu)**

Dear Ladies, Dear Gentlemen,

We find ourselves here in the places where what was called the “Gypsy Camp” at Hodonín u Kunštátu once stood.

There are too many sites with a similarly checkered history in Europe. Be that as it may, this place is different. The vast majority of the staff of this camp were Czech employees.

When one stands in such a place, one asks oneself how this could have happened. How could anybody treat children women and men this way?

7 Then sometimes all one has to do is open the newspaper, or social media. Again and again, somebody somewhere is playing with fire. Even today they are able to stir up hatred and pit people against each other. Some do this for fun, some because they get money or political points out of it. It is disgusting.

We have gathered here not just because we want to make sure nobody forgets what happened. We have also gathered to clearly reject all displays of hatred and wickedness.

More people are good than not.

Jan Zámečník, Deputy Hetman of South Moravian Region

## Martin Maleček, Mayor of Brno North

Dear survivors, dear ladies and gentlemen, dear guests,

We have gathered here today, as we do every year, to commemorate one of the darkest chapters in our common modern history. Soon we will be visiting the memorial at the mass gravesite, a location that bears a distinctive name – *Žalov*. This comes from the word “*žal*” (bereavement), and therefore it denotes sorrow and weeping over all the victims of these places, grief over all those who ended up here solely because they were members of the wrong group of people. It also comes from the word “*žalovat*” (to prosecute), in other words, to constantly recall these events, to be a reminder of them to all who were born after they happened. That actually means reminding everybody, not just those of us who are assembled here.

For that reason, the Museum of Romani Culture, led by director Jana Horváthová, deserves our gratitude for her longstanding, tireless efforts to build this memorial, which will never allow us to forget all that transpired here. Several years ago, when we assembled here, there was a discussion as to whether this had been an extermination camp or “just” a forced labor and prison camp. That debate makes no sense when we know that all of the people who did not perish here as a consequence of the

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inhumane conditions were then rounded up and sent to the extermination camps.

One woman who had been among those who were rounded up back then told us: “None of this had to happen, and yet it did.” Those words are an enormous warning to us all. They hold each of us responsible for making sure that something like the Holocaust of the Jews, the Roma, and anybody else must never happen again. Let’s do our utmost, therefore, to succeed with that mission, so that such events will always only ever belong to the distant past.

Martin Maleček, Mayor of Brno North

## **Dr. Hans-Peter Hinrichsen, Head of the Political Affairs Unit, the ambassador's deputy**

Dear Mrs. Horvathová,

Dear....

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to speak here in Hodonín as representative of the Federal Republic of Germany. I would like to thank you for the invitation and for this opportunity, which I appreciate.

78 years ago, on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1943, a transport of 750 people left Hodonín for Auschwitz. Nearly all of them were murdered in the concentration camp, as was the majority of the Roma and Sinti living in the Czech lands before 1939.

78 years after these events, we must not forget the victims of racial persecution. This is why memorials like this one here in Hodonín and events like this one today are so important. Thank you for the important work you are doing here in Hodonín as well as in Lety near Pisek.

We have to experience today that prejudices are still alive and people are still discriminated for various reasons: because they have a different skin color, a different belief, or a different sexual orientation. Even today, evil can have various forms: hate speech, exclusion from education or work, physical violence and assault.

That is why there cannot be an end to remembrance. We still have a lot of work in front of us - be it in Germany, the Czech Republic, or the EU. We must never forget what took place in the past, how easily it can happen that people are persecuted and marginalized just because they are different in whatever way.

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Thank you for your attention!

Dr. Hans-Peter Hinrichsen, Head of the Political Affairs Unit, the  
ambassador's deputy

## **Andrej Kacorzyk, Director of the International Center for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust, Deputy Director of the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau**

Thank you very much for inviting me to today's ceremony. Thank you for your work on broadening and deepening the memory about the tragedy of the Roma. The criminal ideology of the German Nazis, for whom the Roma and Sinti were racially alien, less valuable and "anti-social", led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of members of this community.

At the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum there are many traces of the crimes committed by the German Nazis on Roma and Sinti. It is primarily the grounds and material remains of the Zigeunerlager, but also a unique exhibition: The Destruction of the European Roma.

The final part of the exhibition depicts the Familienzigeunerlager in Auschwitz II. For the Roma, this was the epicenter of the Nazi genocide against their people. As a result of a decree issued by Himmler on December 16, 1942, almost 23 thousand Roma from various countries were deported to this camp. For almost all the deportees, Auschwitz was the final stage in their persecution, which ended in death as a result of the dreadful living conditions, or killing by the SS in the gas chambers.

Documents on the crime committed against the Roma can be seen in many other places at the Auschwitz Memorial and Museum, first of all by going through the main exhibition, one element which I would like to pay special attention to is. a map showing where Jews, Roma, Poles and groups of other victims were deported from to the camp. When looking at it, visitors often ask a question. Why did the states fighting Germany not use all possible means and bomb the railroads leading to this factory of death? This question leads me to further reflections on the emergence of criminal thoughts, ideologies, the formation of hate systems - the roads leading to Auschwitz and the possibilities of opposing evil, blocking the paths of extermination. Was it possible to detain Hitler: in 1933, in 1935, in 1938, in 1939 ...

Hatred, exclusions, prejudices, stereotypes, anti-Semitism, and anti-Gypsyism are unfortunately more and more dangerous nowadays in the contemporary world. And it is also we who allow them to strengthen, expand and grow whenever we do not react, we pass by indifferently, when we do not express our opinion, when we do not remember what they lead to.

Although our generation is not faced with those dramatic choices, it is up to us and our contemporary choices whether our children and our grandchildren will be able to live and develop equally safely as we.

Andrej Kacorzkyk, Director of the International Center for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust, Deputy Director of the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau

## Roman Kwiatkowski, President of the Association of Roma in Poland

Ladies and Gentlemen

Hodonin is a special place on the map of Roma memory. Our sisters and brothers left from here for Auschwitz, where their fate was to be fulfilled as part of the inhuman plan to liquidate the entire nation.

Hodonin - just like Kunstat and Lety - prove that wherever people are deprived of their rights because of race, origin, religion or orientation, it ends in a crime against all mankind. In 1942 it was decided that all "Gypsies and Gypsy crossbreeds" from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia should be evicted from their homes and sent to forced labour camps. The Moravian Roma found themselves here, the Czech Roma - in Lety.

Under the supervision of Czech guards - their former neighbours - exhausted by inhuman work, starved and exposed to diseases, the Roma died here and were buried in mass graves. Cattle wagons waited for the survivors, in which they were transported to the death factory in Auschwitz. Nobody survived the first transport from Hodonin. Of more than 5,000 deported Roma survived only a few percent.

We, Polish Roma, are the keepers of memory in Oświęcim, and we are grateful to all those who keep the memory of the Holocaust here in Hodonin and in every other place where our relatives, friends and confreres died. Remembering the past makes us think about the present and the future - so that the terrible history of the times of contempt will never have to repeat itself.

This place, like the entire history of the Holocaust, cannot leave anyone indifferent. Indifference is synonymous with consent. Wherever hatred and racism triumph over

the rule of law, it does not happen without the passive support of a silent and indifferent majority. Therefore, we cultivate the memory of the Roma Holocaust in order to leave as little room as possible in the minds and hearts for indifference and passivity.

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Europe is not a place free from racism, anti-Semitism, intolerance and anti-Gypsyism. In many countries acts of violence, hate crimes, isolating us from our neighbours still occur. This is often the case with the support of politicians who use fear and hatred for their own particular goals.

**The Roma are scattered all over Europe. All countries have been our homeland for hundreds of years. We must therefore believe that the values on which a politically united Europe has been built embrace all its citizens. We believe that Europe will consistently defend these values, reacting unequivocally and decisively wherever they are violated or disregarded at the expense of people, regardless of their ethnic origin. Only then we will be sure that Hodonin, Lety and Auschwitz will never be repeated.**

Roman Kwiatkowski, President of the Association of Roma in Poland

## **Jiřina Somsiová, relative of the victims of so called „Gypsy camp“ in Hodonín u Kunštátu**

Dear Madame Horváthová, Dear Guests,

It is a great honor for me to speak here today in Hodonín u Kunštátu on behalf of those whose loved ones suffered here.

I am from the Daniel family, from Bílovice near Uherské Hradiště.

My father was born in 1922, his brother Rudolf in 1924, his brother Josef in 1926, his brother Zdeněk in 1928, and his sister Jiřina in 1931.

My father and his brothers survived these horrors. His sister Jiřina died in the gas chambers.

My mother was abducted by the authorities along with her three children, my siblings.

Early one morning in 1940 the gendarmes arrived in Bílovice, they had come from the municipality and were looking for men as laborers. They brought them here to

Hodonín u Kunštátu, where they built the long wooden barracks. After that they had to work at the quarry, the rocks were used to build the road. After one year there, they came home. My Uncle Rudolf was deployed to the Reich (the Nazi German Empire).

In 1941 they all reunited at home.

Then once again a new roundup of all Romani people began, this time without exception – men, elders, invalids, women and children. They were brought en masse into the Old Town, to the train station, entire families, there were a thousand of them. They pushed them into the railway wagons, crushed together without food, without water, without hygiene facilities. They had no idea how long of a trip they were taking. Many died of suffocation.

The train stopped, the doors opened, and the horror that awaited them is indescribable. German women, Polish women, and even Czech women were there to drive them with sticks, the children were shouting, and my mother did not want to let the women take them – ultimately one woman grabbed my sister from her arms, just eight months old, and hurled her against the side of the railway wagon.

My mother didn't know where my father or any of their relatives were. She was subjected to hunger, incessant beatings, verbal abuse, humiliation, and she and my

uncles were subjected to the quasi-medical experiments of Mengele. The female prisoners helped each other survive.

The cruelty they experienced could never be forgotten. They frequently wept, they screamed in their sleep – my father was told to beat his own brother 50 times with a cane, and when he refused to, he was beaten 50 times himself. He was frequently sent to work in the antechamber, he had to drag out the dead bodies with a hook, but some of the people were still alive – and he and another prisoner had to throw them onto the cart that brought them to the furnace. He even saw his own relatives and other people he knew among them.

It is very important that we constantly remind ourselves of the horrors that happened in Hodonín u Kunštátu and in Auschwitz.

I would like to thank Madame Director Jana Horváthová.

Jiřina Somsiová, relative of the victims of so called „Gypsy camp“ in Hodonín u Kunštátu

## COMMEMORATIVE CEREMONY PROGRAM

11:00 Opening of the commemorative gathering

11:10 Remarks by the director of the Museum of Romani Culture, PhDr. Jana Horváthová, Memorial manager Mgr. Radovan Krhovský, and Mgr. Anna Míšková

11:25 Speeches

11:55 Book launch – Czech translation of the memoir of Philomena Franz, produced for the Czech-German Fund for the Future, published by *KHER*

12:10 Winner of the second annual song competition run by the *Živé paměti* [Living Memory] organization, entitled *Stínové oběti* [Shadow Victims]. Written by Patrik Kala. Performed by Mélusine de Pas on viola de gamba.

12:25 Relocation to Žalov

12:30 Žalov – brief introduction to the site, the priest, and information about laying wreaths

12:40 Remarks by Father Petr Jan Vinš

12:55 Laying of wreaths and lighting of candles

18 13:15 Official part of the ceremony ends – information about optional refreshments and guided tours of the memorial

13:20 Return to the memorial, refreshments served

13:40 Guided tours of the exhibition begin

14:35 Buses leave the memorial for Černovice

14:55-15:10 Paying respects to the memories of those buried at Černovice

15:10 Commemorative gathering ends

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