



Press Release

May 7th 2021

Keeping the flame of Romani Resistance Alive Transnational Romani Resistance Week

On **May 16th 2021**, Romani communities across Europe will be lighting fires to mark the 77th anniversary of the **Romani Uprising** at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp. On that day in 1944 Roma prisoners of the so-called *Zigeunerlager* at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp, having heard of the imminent liquidation of the camp, stood up against the Nazi guards armed with only hammers, pickaxes and shovels. As a result of their defiance, no Roma died in the gas chambers on that day. The Roma revolt against the Nazis is the only recorded uprising in Auschwitz and is now widely commemorated as the **Romani Resistance Day**.

This year on May 16, Roma are coming together yet again to oppose the increasing wave of far-right and hate sweeping across Europe and the world.

Europe needs to leave behind its dark history of oppression, racism and genocide. Nazism and Fascism are often seen as being aberrations in European history. But in times of crisis, when populists and far-right advocates rise to power, history often repeats itself. In recent elections across Europe hate-speech, violence against Roma and the use of symbols of hate rose dangerously. On May 16, under a common theme of “standing up against the far right”, the Roma ask the current leadership of their countries and the leadership of the European Union, to take all the steps necessary to ensure that the over 12 million Romani people that live in Europe are protected. The organizers call on Roma to unite and demonstrate the **historic Romani resilience** in the face of any threat to Romani communities, values and culture.

Inspired by the courage of their ancestors who stood up against the Nazis in the most horrendous and hopeless conditions, Romani communities across Europe are organizing the **Transnational Romani Resistance Week** from the 9th to the 16th of May, in a series of online and offline activities and events. The commemorative activities will reach its peak on **Sunday May 16th at 16.00 CET** with local **Romani**

Resistance Marches organized in the hearts of Romani communities around Europe. The March is organized under a common theme to fan the flames of resistance against hate, growing nationalism and populism. To oppose the increasing far-right nationalist parties and movements across Europe, t as a symbol that they are determined to keep the flame of Romani Resistance alive.

Romani activists will gather to remember Romani Resistance fighters by symbolically lighting fires to prove that fire can also heal, inspire, unify and purify. In doing so they will have actively reclaimed the elemental force of fire from the hatred of the Auschwitz crematorium and ignited a new resolve to work for the equality of their communities.

The initiative, developed by a **coalition of international, national and grassroots Romani organisations**, invites universal participation of all Roma and non-Roma who are committed to supporting open societies built on mutual respect, equality, humanity and dignity. Respecting local Covid-19 regulations, the organizers encourage others to join and/or organize their own local Romani Resistance Marches in a common message to stop the spread of populist, far-right movements and make a pledge to Roma. In a joint call for action, the initiative “**Pledge for Roma**” is launched to mobilize wide-spread commitment to defending the rights of Roma. Companies, NGO’s, public institutions and people of all backgrounds are invited to make a pledge on **PledgeForRoma.org** to inspire tangible contributions to the world-wide alliance for improving the lives of Roma communities.

Notes for Editors

- **The Proud Roma Free Europe campaign is run by a coalition of international, national and grassroots Romani campaign organisations across Europe. It has a Romani leadership and both Gadje (non-Romani) and Romani staff and volunteers.**
- **The campaign website is www.proudroma.org**
- The international partners in the campaign are the Open Society Roma Initiatives Office (RIO), European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC), Roma Education Fund (REF), and the Roma Entrepreneurship Development Initiative (REDI).
- The National advocacy partners are Aresel (Romania), Avaja (North Macedonia), Kethane (Italy), Roma Standing Conference (Bulgaria), Opre Roma (Serbia), Opre Roma (Slovakia), and KOSINT (Kosovo).
- The Roma Media Partners are Roma News Portal (France), EU Roma Press portal, TV Roma EU (Germany), Roma Integration Zentrum (Germany).