

## Concept Note and Call for Inputs

### Romani Memory Map for the Americas

#### Background

The troubled situation of Roma is at the heart of human rights review of States in Europe, as well as increasingly outside Europe. Discrimination against Roma has been the subject of a specific CERD General Recommendation 27 of 2000, as well as a 2014 Human Rights Council Resolution 26/4, recognizing that Roma have faced, for centuries, widespread and enduring human rights violations, discrimination, rejection, social exclusion and marginalization all over the world and in all areas of life. The situation of Roma has been a focus of extensive commitments during the World Conference against Racism and its 2009 follow-up conference.<sup>1</sup>

An increasing focus on stigma as a driver of human rights abuse is increasingly seen in a number of human rights areas.<sup>2</sup> Where Roma and related groups<sup>3</sup> are concerned, this specific form of racism is referred to as “antigypsyism”.<sup>4</sup> In 2015, the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues published a *Global Study on the Human Rights Situation of Roma Worldwide*<sup>5</sup>, focusing in particular on human rights abuses driven by antigypsyism. A number of Governments, civil society actors, National Human Rights Institutions and

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://www.un.org/en/durbanreview2009/ddpa.shtml>

<sup>2</sup> A 2013 report of United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture Juan Mendez on torture in health care settings examines in particular “Stigmatized identities” as a driver of human rights abuse, noting that “Many policies and practices that lead to abuse in health-care settings are due to discrimination targeted at persons who are marginalized. Discrimination plays a prominent role because “bias commonly underlie[s] such violations” (A/HRC/22/33, paras. 36-38).

<sup>3</sup> Including, in the Americas context, Calon, Ciganos, Gitanos, Travellers, and others. Hereafter simply “Roma” or “Romani”.

<sup>4</sup> The Alliance against Antigypsyism defines antigypsyism as follows: “Antigypsyism is the specific racism towards Roma, Sinti, Travellers and others who are stigmatized as ‘gypsies’ in the public imagination.” (<http://antigypsyism.eu/>)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Minorities/SRMinorities/Pages/GlobalStudyonRomaworldwide.aspx> .

equality bodies have in recent years devoted efforts to tackling discrimination and other human rights abuse against Roma, including by endeavoring to address the underlying causes of these abuses.

In the recent period, OHCHR has dedicated extensive efforts to strengthening attention to the need to address antigypsyism, as well as to strengthening Roma rights in the Americas. The Americas have been in particular focus in OHCHR's recent programming for reasons including the comparatively lower attention to date by public institutions to the situation of Roma in the Americas, as well as due to calls by Romani civil society in the Americas drawing attention to the relative exclusion of Romani people in the Americas to global developments in the field of Romani rights. Under the leadership of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, OHCHR produced two documents to highlight the human rights situation of the Romani community and encourage countries in the Americas to take action for equality. The first, from 2015, was the report of the "Regional Workshop on the Situation of Roma in the Americas" produced after the "Roma in the Americas" meeting held in Brasilia, Brazil.<sup>6</sup> In 2017, the second "Roma in the Americas" meeting was held and its main results and recommendations to the states were published in the annual report of the Special Rapporteurs on Minorities Issues (2017). In September 2022 and May 2023, OHCHR convened a global meeting on [Roma and memorialization](#), as well as a follow-up meeting on [Memorialization as a Strategy to Tackle Antigypsyism in the Americas](#), respectively<sup>7</sup>.

### **Roma and Memorialization**

Antigypsyism has contributed to the history and memory of the Romani people to be erased from public spaces and/or misrepresented by collective memory. This phenomenon has had strong negative implications on the life and dynamics of Romani people and communities.

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<sup>6</sup> A/HRC/31/CRP.2

<sup>7</sup> For more information on OHCHR's work on Roma rights:  
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/minorities/advancing-roma-inclusion> .

The history and memory of Romani communities around the world are almost fully absent from official narratives and rarely a part of the official histories of their countries. Where Roma appears in official history, in most cases information is partial, and may be distorted by stereotypes and bias. Periods of slavery, the Holocaust, evictions and expulsion, coercive sterilization of Romani women, and other episodes of persecution have not yet been properly recognized or memorialized. At the same time, the positive contributions of Romani communities to societies have also been erased from official history.

In the recent period, this situation has begun slowly to change, as a result of the dedicated efforts of new generations of Romani civil society and human rights defenders. The recent removal of a pig farm at the site of the World War II-era concentration camp for Roma at Lety u Pisku is a sign of changing times, although a victory which took close to three decades to achieve.<sup>8</sup>

The UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence has dedicated increasing attention to questions of memorialization, in which he observed:

“... the crucial role played by memorialization processes in the context of transitional justice, which is fully recognized by the rules and standards of contemporary international law. The work carried out on these past violations serves as a basis for reflection on the present and identification of contemporary issues related to exclusion, discrimination, marginalization and abuses of power, which are often linked to toxic political cultures. Positive work in the area of memory not only helps to build democratic cultures in which human rights are respected but also fulfils the legal obligation of States to guarantee human rights.”<sup>9</sup>

According to the Special Rapporteur on cultural rights,

“In many societies, history teaching either altogether ignores or carries, validates or strengthens stereotypes about marginalized groups, especially minorities and indigenous peoples, in addition to women and the poor. The dominant homogenizing narrative blanches out diversity,

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.rommuz.cz/en/lety-u-pisku/present-days/opening-ceremony-of-the-demolition-of-the-former-pig-farm/>

<sup>9</sup> [A/HRC/45/45](#)

ignoring the cultural heritage of everyone outside the group in power, simultaneously depriving the majority of the opportunity to understand the complexity of their country”.<sup>10</sup>

As a result of racism and the dearth of official memory where Roma are concerned, legacies of antigypsyism continue to be a vivid and powerful force today in societies throughout the world.

### **Romani Memory Map for the Americas**

To tackle this aspect of antigypsyism and promote the inclusion of Roma, the creation of a Romani Memory Map for the Americas is proposed. The main goals of this project are:

- a. Encouraging the emergence of public and private spaces of memory or the promotion of those that already exist, *inter alia* in order to reconstruct and give new meaning to erased memory;
- b. Valorizing the participation of Romani people in national histories and in the history of human civilization worldwide;
- c. Promoting the improvement of public information about Roma, including the improvement of data tracking the implementation of the SDGs where Roma are concerned, and the effective realization of human rights by Roma, including gendered and intersectional aspects.
- d. Promoting academic or informal research on the Roma in the Americas, with the participation and leadership of Romani scholars and experts.
- e. Promoting awareness and recognition in the inter-American space of antigypsyism /anti-Roma racism as a specific form of racism against Roma.
- f. Encouraging public memory policies for the Romani people in the Americas, guaranteed by resolution 3/2019 of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, in the document entitled [“Principles on Public Policies on Memory in the Americas”](#).
- g. Promoting the official recognition of specific dates for the Romani people and their respective commemoration at the national level, such as April 8 International

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<sup>10</sup> [A/68/296](#)

Roma Day, and August 2 International Roma Holocaust Memorial Day (Samudaripen).

The Romani Memory Map initiative also aims to contribute to the upcoming 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations of International Roma Holocaust Memorial Day on 2 August 2024, which commemorates the anniversary of the August 2-3 liquidation of the “Zigeunerlager” in Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, and the killing by the Nazis of several thousand Roma over the course of one night.

### **Partnership**

The Romani Memory Map is a partnership initially of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); Laboratorio de Estudos sobre Etnicidade (LEER /Universidade de São Paulo), Brazil; Gonzaga University, USA; and the Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences. Romani human rights defenders, including the activists of the Roma Advisory of North America, as well as Romani civil society human rights defenders from throughout the Americas participate actively in the initiative, including as part of the project’s Expert Panel and Review Board.

### **How to contribute to the elaboration of the Romani Memory Map?**

The Romani Memory Map is a collective, crowd-sourced project. Anyone can join the initiative and an open call for collaboration is made public. To contribute, participants need to fill out a Outlook form (Please see below the questions included in Outlook forms), proposing a **Romani Memory Point**. On the forms, participants can also add links to photos and videos to be added to the map.

Information published on the map will provide due recognition to the person or entity submitting the information. The person suggesting a Romani Memory Point of Interest needs to have the right to post that information, i.e. information should not be copyrighted, confidential or legally privileged. Persons submitting information will also be asked to affirm that, to the best of their knowledge, no person is put at risk of harm or

other detriment through the submission of materials, or through proposing their publication.

Submissions will be reviewed by (1) an Expert Panel for first-level technical vetting, followed by (2) a Review Board, convened for the purposes of ensuring technical and historical accuracy in the materials published.

Submission of proposals or materials does not mean automatic publication. Texts, images and other material submitted will be evaluated by an expert panel. The bodies reviewing submitted material reserve the right to reject submissions not deemed relevant or appropriate for this project.

### **What should the proposal consist?**

A **Romani Memory Point** is a place of memory relevant to Romani history or culture that will figure on the map. The applicant may submit places of memory of different purposes: documentary archive on Roma; localities, streets and parks; cemeteries, home, city or birthplace of some Romani personality; place where some tragic event in Romani history took place; neighborhood characterized by present or past Romani presence; Romani cultural centers, etc.

A demand for the revaluation or recognition of Romani memory can also be submitted and be of different sorts: changing the names of localities, streets and parks; marking sites of terror with plaques that explain the past; erecting new memorials and statues to change the “memoryscape”; organizing official and unofficial commemorations of various historical events and figures; establishing on-site, itinerant and online museums and exhibitions; ask for public recognition of some Romani personality; request the construction of a museum, a memorial center or a Romani cultural center in some neighborhood; request the inclusion of information about Roma in some museum, library or documentary archive. The project will gather such requests and will evaluate how to act on them. The project cannot commit to any particular action in this regard, but will make good faith efforts to evaluating them, also with a view to action in the context of

efforts surrounding the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations of International Day of the Romani Holocaust on 2 August 2024.

To propose a Romani Memory Point, it is recommended that the applicant submit documents that prove and strengthen the proposal. These documents can be newspaper articles, transcribed or recorded oral testimonies, official documents, etc.

Proposals are accepted in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese.

### **Deadline**

The deadline for submitting proposals is **31 August 2023**. The Romani Memory Map for the Americas is slated for publication in December 2023.

### **Technical Issues**

The map will be created on an open platform and will be made available publicly, at a site to be announced subsequently.

To submit a proposal for a Roma Memory Point, please kindly provide the information below via this link:

<https://forms.office.com/e/NUDmRP8aBm>

For any further inquiries about the call for contribution or for sending any additional documentation, please contact [aline.miklos@un.org](mailto:aline.miklos@un.org)

- Name:
- Email:
- Institutional affiliation (if applicable):
- Physical place of memory (address/location/city/country):
- Googlemap location, if available:
- Is there already a reference to Romani memory in this place? If positive, please describe it, pointing out its qualities or deficiencies and how it can be improved, if it's the case.

- If there is no reference to Romani Memory in this place, please briefly present this site and justify why it should be a Memory Point.
- Is there a website associated with this place of memory? Please provide the URL if applicable
- Is this a public or private space?
- Would you like to propose the construction of a statue, museum, plaque, or other device at this location? What would this proposal look like?
- Write a text of no more than 2500 characters presenting the Point of Memory (history, place, what it represents for the city or country etc.) and explaining your proposal. The previous questions should be useful as a guide for your text. This text will be submitted for evaluation. If approved, it will be published with the map
- Would you like to add photos to this map? If so, please add the link (URL) to the photos here. The photos do not need to be of your authorship, but the images or videos need either to be in the public domain, or you must be able to show that there are rights of public usage.
- Would you like to add videos to this map? If so, please add the video link (URL) here. The video does not necessarily have to be of your own authorship, but you should have the right to share it.
- Is there documentation that supports your proposal? If so, please add the link here. If the documentation is not on the Internet, please add it to some cloud storage (google drive, dropbox etc) and add the link here. Don't forget to allow open access to the document you will create in the cloud storage.
- I agree and affirm the following statement: “I have the right to post the information and/or materials submitted. The information submitted is not subject to copyright, confidential or legally privileged. I further affirm that, to the best of my knowledge, I am putting no person at risk of harm or other detriment through the submission of these materials, or through proposing their publication.”