

General Comment No. 1/2017

of the Minority Ombudsman on the situation of Roma Holocaust education in Hungary and its role in shaping social awareness

SUMMARY

The horrible events of World War II had deep-rooted social and historical antecedents, and the Holocaust illustrates how a society can sink from seemingly isolated human rights violations against individuals to the mass and systematic extermination of human life. The growing intolerance, anti-Gypsyism and xenophobia that we are witnessing around the world today, as well as the unjustified incitement of fear against people, communities or groups of people or simply against people or communities perceived as being contrary to the values of the majority society, can trigger equally dangerous processes in European societies. In Hungary, too, we can find tragic examples of processes that have resulted in the loss of lives of our fellow citizens because of their ethnic/nationality. Online and offline hate speech and the activities of the Hungarian Guard can be seen as a precursor to the murders of Roma in 2008-2009 and the dozens of attacks against Roma in this period.

The importance and necessity of teaching about the Roma Holocaust has been explicitly declared by several international human rights documents in recent decades, with almost all United Nations human rights education guidelines and resolutions recommending the inclusion of anti-racist and intercultural elements.

The general comment provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of Roma Holocaust education and also suggests some reasonable and necessary ways forward, in order to emphasise the need to strengthen tolerance, respect for fundamental rights and democratic values in the education of younger generations. The document states that quality education on the Roma Holocaust can become a tool in Hungary not only to help Roma/Gypsy communities to exercise their right to freely assume and preserve their identity as defined in the Fundamental Law, but also to develop and strengthen values based on respect for human rights in society.

The resolution was presented at a meeting of the Education and Culture Subcommittee of the Parliament's Committee of the Nationalities in Hungary. The publication of the document was preceded by careful research, including an analysis of the regulatory environment of Holocaust education in Hungary, the representation of the Roma Holocaust in formal and non-formal education, the representation of the Holocaust in textbooks, related ombudsman activities, and international and national good practices. The work was also greatly assisted by a professional round table discussion with experts on the subject.