

Good evening. I am Chantelle Watson and this is Justine Wilson. We are Scottish Gypsy/Travellers and founding members of Article 12 in Scotland's Young Gypsy Travellers' Lives Project. In keeping with what we are remembering today, our presentation begins with Gypsies and the Holocaust and is followed by examples of the discrimination and prejudice experienced by our community in present times.

Europe's Gypsies were targeted by the Nazis for total destruction. The Porrajmos - meaning the devouring and commemorated on the 4th of August - is the term used to describe the genocide of Europe's Gypsy population by the Nazis.

The experience of Europe's Gypsy population has parallels with that of the Jewish people. Both were targeted on the grounds of their race and had previously suffered centuries of discrimination. The Nuremberg Laws - which prohibited marriage between Jews and Aryans and enshrined the loss of citizenship rights - were also applied to Gypsies. As with Jewish children, Gypsy children were banned from public schools and Gypsies found it increasingly difficult to find or keep work.

As the Second World War began the persecution of Gypsies intensified. Deportations of Gypsies to ghettos and to concentration camps including Auschwitz-Birkenau - which had a specific 'Gypsy Camp'- began.

On 26 February 1943, the first transport of Gypsy men, women and children arrived in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Of the 23,000 Gypsies imprisoned within the camp, it's estimated that around 20,000 were murdered.

In August 1944 the Gypsy Camp at Auschwitz was liquidated and 2,897 Gypsies were exterminated in the gas chambers. The surviving prisoners were deported to Buchenwald and Ravensbruck concentration camps for forced labour.

Determining the percentage or number of Gypsies who died in the Holocaust has not been easy - numbers cannot be verified by means of lists or card-indexes or camp files- as most of the Gypsies died in eastern or southern Europe - shot by execution troops or fascist gang members. However, a 1997 figure - reported by the late Dr Sybil Milton, then senior historian at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Research Institute in Washington - put the number of Gypsy lives lost by 1945 at “between a half and one and a half million”. The same figure appears again in a November 2001 report issued by the International Organisation for Migration - a body designated to locate and compensate surviving Gypsy Holocaust victims. The report states that “recent research indicates that up to 1.5 million Gypsies perished during the Nazi era”.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights - which arose directly from the experience of the Second World War and represents the first global expression of rights to which all human beings are entitled - states that:

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”

Sadly, 60 years on, these remain empty words for many in the Gypsy/Traveller community as discrimination and prejudice (which Sir Trevor Philips, chair of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, describes as “the last ‘acceptable’ form of racism in the UK”.) is experienced by Gypsy/Travellers, here in Scotland, on a daily basis.

A nomadic way of life is a key element within Scottish Gypsy/Traveller culture - but life on the road is difficult. Due to a lack of stopping places that meet our cultural needs we are forced to set up unauthorised road side encampments, often miles from villages and towns and from which we are regularly moved on from – this makes it difficult for us to access education, health services, water, find or keep work and make new friends. Our encampments are often stoned and we are regularly racially abused.

For those of us living on long term sites or in houses life can be just as difficult. For example: a recent wholesale banning of members of the Gypsy/Traveller community from a cinema (due to the behaviour of a few). Obviously we accept that bad behaviour has consequences - **but** we do not accept that a whole community should be collectively punished for the actions of a few and we are sure that if the people in question had been from the settled community then a wholesale banning would not have happened.

Discriminatory **actions** can be dealt with by law and policy but it is the prejudicial **attitudes** – such as 49% of respondees to the 2006 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey stating that Gypsy/Travellers were unsuitable for employment as a primary school teacher – which - without a willing from all members of society - are the most difficult to change.

So, with that in mind addressing prejudice is everyone's business. Because, until there is a universal acceptance that Gypsy/Travellers have the same rights entitlements as others: that there is no exception for those who do not 'fit' the cultural norms of mainstream society; there will always be prejudice towards our community.

And finally, in the spirit of the great human rights activist, Martin Luther King, we also “have a dream” and that dream is to realise our rights to speak for ourselves and live in a diverse Scotland, free from prejudice. We hope those here present and others in the wider community will work with us to make that dream a reality.

Thank you.