

Pope wants gypsies integrated into society

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Europe's Gypsies, Roma and other nomads should be integrated into society but must live by the law, Pope Benedict said.

Some 2,000 members of the Roma, Sinti, Manouche, Kale, Yenish and Romanichais people from various European countries attended what the Vatican billed as the first papal audience for Gypsies.

They danced and sang for the pope while playing violins. Some told of ancestors killed in Nazi concentration camps and life today in squalid camps on city outskirts.

In his address, the pope defended their right to proper housing and schooling, saying that should constitute the basis of an integration that would benefit both them and society.

"Never again should your people be the object of vexation, rejection and contempt," he said.

"On your part, always seek justice, legality, reconciliation and make an effort never to be the cause of other people's suffering," he added.

Many Italians blame nomads for crime, including drug trafficking and petty theft.

One of those who addressed the pope was Ceija Stojka from Austria who spent part of her childhood in three Nazi concentration camps, including Auschwitz.

"I was a child and I had to watch the deaths of other children ... I lived among the dead and the living dead. I asked myself why? What have we done?" she said in German. "I still smell the odour of burning bodies".

The Nazis killed millions of Jews, homosexuals, Gypsies and dissidents in their camps.

- Reuters

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