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Prelate Condemns World War II Gypsy Genocide

Calls for Integration in Society

ROME, APRIL 21, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- A history of discrimination and persecution, including genocide perpetrated by the Nazis during World War II, calls for an active integration of gypsies in society, says Archbishop Antonio Vegliò.

The president of the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travelers stressed the importance of this integration so that the people of this cultural group will be able to overcome their fear of being absorbed and deprived of their identity.

The prelate made these points in an address for the April 9 opening of the Salone Editoria dell'Impegno exhibition in Gottaferata, near the abbey of St. Nilus, outside Rome.

The theme of the exhibition, which ended Sunday, was "Nomad Peoples: A World That Must Be Opened. From Porrajmos to Integration;" in Romani, the language of gypsies, the genocide is called "porrajmos," literally translated as "destruction."

Archbishop Vegliò recalled the intolerance and harassment suffered by gypsies with the racial persecution carried out by Nazism. He noted their deportation to concentration camps and the physical elimination of thousands of people, which only raised isolated protests and awakened little interest in historians.

The prelate also recalled that Pope John Paul II condemned the extermination of gypsies in his message for the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II.

Moreover, the archbishop added, "placed in this line is the request for God's forgiveness for the sins committed against gypsies by children of the Church, expressed by John Paul II on March 12, 2000" during the Jubilee Year.

Archbishop Vegliò noted that his dicastery is one of the youngest organisms of the Roman Curia, and that it follows people who for various reasons are far from their homeland or parish territory, among them the nomad communities.

He stated that the study of the reality of gypsies "led the pontifical council to publish the 'Guidelines for a Pastoral Care of Gypsies,' in December of 2005 -- a first document of the Church at the universal level, dedicated to these people."

Among the positive values of gypsy peoples, the prelate underlined their "fraternal hospitality, their profound sense of solidarity, and strong attachment to the faith of their predecessors."

He stated that in addition to appreciating these values, it is necessary "to support the process of integration of gypsies within the culture of the society that surrounds them, with the consequent change of mentality both in the ecclesiastic as well as the civil realm, and with the creation of structures that guarantee the continuity of the process of participation, which requires longer time."

Identity

The guidelines indicate how "the long history of tensions and persecutions has left a mark on gypsy identity," the archbishop said.

He added that "the fear of being absorbed and deprived of their identity reinforces their resistance to assimilation and also to integration."

Because of this, one of the duties is to have "particularly vulnerable gypsies be considered and accepted as full members of the human family," Archbishop Vegliò asserted.

In order to do so, he said, it is necessary to respect their identity, to develop the defense of their rights and the observance of respective duties.

The prelate explained, "A healthy political organization demands that the more individuals are defenseless in a society, the more they need the interest and attention of all and in particular of the public authority."

Hence, he said, states must promote types of openness that make possible the positive insertion of gypsies.

The archbishop recalled that "experience teaches that to favor the process of integration of gypsies in the Church, it is necessary to lean on persons who are integrating, that is, who are capable of dialogue and mediation."

He also underlined the necessity of pastoral agents who act as mediators and found communities as bridges because "the sharing of daily life very often has more value than many speeches."

He appealed to Christian communities to be liberated from prejudices and to accept meeting them.

Responsible participation

And, of course, "the gypsy minority" must be committed "to fulfill its duties and obligations with the active and responsible participation of each of its members," Archbishop Vegliò said.

He noted that "in the world of young people a change is under way that manifests itself in greater awareness of their dignity and of the value of professional formation, of study and schooling," along with the willingness to participate in politics and the desire of the human and social promotion of the members of the ethnic group itself.

In addition, the prelate highlighted the role of the Council of Europe, of international organizations and of states in effecting a positive change.

He also recalled the appeal to the media, promoted in 2004, not to give a distorted image of the gypsy community.

One of the necessary factors for the pastoral care of gypsies is education, professional qualification and the acquisition of competencies for a fitting quality of life, the archbishop affirmed.

He specified that in Europe young gypsies number some 6 million and that several religious congregations and ecclesiastical movements are committed on the front line in working with them, among them 14 Salesian communities.

Archbishop Vegliò concluded, "I wish that for actions in favor of gypsies we let ourselves be guided by two golden rules elaborated by young gypsies in the World Congress of Freising: to be able to listen, that is, to know one another better and to act in favor of them but especially with them."

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