

**Holocaust Memorial Ceremony marking
the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust**

United Nations Headquarters, New York

Friday, 27 January 2023

Building Home, Together

Ethel Brooks, Rutgers University
2023 UN Holocaust Remembrance Speech

Secretary-General, Excellencies, respected Holocaust Survivors and your families, all of you here with us today, *Romale*, Friends,

T'aven bahtale.

It is an honor for me to be here today.

I am here today to build with you a home. I am here today to belong with you as part of a community of remembrance. Together, we honor those whose lives were taken, those who were murdered at the hands of the Nazis and their allies. We honor those who lost family and loved ones. We honor those who survived, who built lives, homes, and community in the wake of genocide, even when the homes to which they returned after the war had been destroyed or taken away. Our acts of remembrance, our ceremonies of commemoration, continue the work of building home and creating belonging.

I come before you as a Romani woman, belonging to a Romani community. For us, Roma and Sinti, home is family. Our ancestors and our descendants. The network of mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, sisters, brothers, cousins, and children who make up our sense of who we are. Home is the stories we tell and belonging is the community we build. Even as we have been denied homes, citizenship, belonging, we come together to make home wherever we are, through our memories, our language, our *romanipen*—our cultural foundation. Through our ancestors, our foremothers, and through each other. Home is in our names, given to us by our communities. Home is in the ways that we see each other, recognize each other, share with each other.

Across the centuries, we—Romani people, Jewish people, all of those whose lives were deemed not worth living—have been told that we do not belong, that we do not have a home. The Holocaust was part of that larger history that continues to this day, every time someone is told, “You don’t belong here.”

The continued persecution and violence that Romani people face across Europe and beyond are long-lasting legacies of the Holocaust. We must work together, in official commemorations and in everyday acts of remembrance, to document the atrocities that were carried out against our people, and to recognize and honor the victims and survivors.

Recognition also means standing up for those who continue to face violence and persecution, to fight against racial and ethnic violence, and to remind the world of the brutality and discrimination to which, regrettably, Roma and Sinti are subject to this day, in places like Belgrade and Thessaloniki, just this past month.

This work continues, and this fight for a better world for everyone is the home that we create together. Today, we come together to commemorate all those whom we lost, we honor those who survived, and we continue to build home together.

For hundreds of thousands of Roma and Sinti murdered, for millions of their family members and for all of us, the Holocaust took away our sense of home even as the Nazis and their allies took away the possibility of home. In the face of violence, murder, destruction and genocide, we have continued to build home—made home—through love, remembering, calling upon one another.

I want to pause to remember, to recall, names and lives of two of our foremothers. To say the names of those we have lost and those who survived.

Amalie Baumann-Blach

born: 1910 (Venice)

*imprisoned in: ***lager Maxglan, Salzburg*

Partner of Matthias Krems (Auschwitz-Birkenau).

Children: Agathe, Anna, Ernst and Frieda (Auschwitz-Birkenau),

deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau on April, 3rd 1943

Z-6574. She died on June, 26th 1944

Ella Wittich Davis

born: September 10, 1934 (Stuttgart)

survivor of: eight concentration camps, including Auschwitz-Birkenau, Ravensbrück, Mauthausen, Hamburg and Bergen-Belsen

Daughter of Alvin Wittich and Sophie Wittich. Sister of Horst Wittich and others

Partner of Curtis Davis Sr.

Mother of Belinda Margitta Gilmore; Curtis Argusta Davis Jr.; Diana Barby Rosario;

Donald Ingo Samuel Wittich; Jolanda Spragins Linda Pamela Denise Meggi Carmen Swann.

Grandmother, Great-Grandmother.

Z-5937. She died on November 12, 2004 in Columbia, South Carolina.

Ella and Amalie, our aunts, our grandmothers, our kin. Amalie died in Auschwitz-Birkenau, along with her entire family; Ella survived, living until the age of 70. My act of remembrance, today and every day, is to say their names and to remember their lives and those whom they loved. I bring their memories into this room, today, and into the home that we continue to build every day, for everyone.

And we call out the names of each of those whom we remember every time we stand up for the rights and dignity of all those people pushed to the margins, denied home, and told “You do not belong.”

Home. *Kher.*

I call upon you, as I hope you will call upon me, to continue building home for everyone. For those who have gone before, for the survivors who are still here with us, for those of us facing war, persecution, insecurity, expulsion, disease, and violence. Let's build a home of belonging, of solidarity of justice and of love.

Latcho dives. Nais tuke.