

René Cassin
853 Finchley Road
London, NW11 8LX

4th March 2019

The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London, SW1P 4DF

Dear Home Secretary,

I am writing to express René Cassin's concern at the Government's portrayal and treatment of Britain's Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

René Cassin, the Jewish voice for human rights, works to promote and protect human rights in the UK, drawing on Jewish experiences and values. For many years we have been working to tackle the discrimination and prejudice faced by the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in the UK. For this work we have won an Interfaith award and were commended by the then Prime Minister David Cameron.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities together constitute Europe's largest ethnic minority and they share a history of persecution with Jewish people. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities experience more racism and discrimination than any other group in the UK and face multiple disadvantages, such as with regards to education, health, housing, the workplace and the justice system. The discrimination faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities has been labelled 'the last bastion of acceptable racism'. But it **should not** be acceptable –and as a Jewish organisation René Cassin strongly condemns all forms of discrimination and prejudice.

On 9th February 2019, the Home Office issued a statement regarding a crackdown on 'illegal traveller sites' as a way of 'protecting our local communities'. We are deeply concerned about this use of discriminatory language, which legitimises the criminalisation of an entire community. It is this kind of discrimination that permeates the deepest levels of society, such that it is often not even recognised for what it is.

It must be noted that those who live on unauthorised sites largely do so because there are not enough authorised sites to park. According to a recent report from the Equality and Human Rights Commission entitled 'Is Britain Fairer?' (2018), Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are at higher risk of homelessness and experiencing poor housing than other communities. The Equality and Human Rights Commission went on to state that "a more hostile housing policy environment towards Gypsies and Travellers in England has been linked to an increase in unauthorised encampments".

The need for equal rights when it comes to housing has been most poignantly highlighted by a [Romany Gypsy schoolboy](#), aged 10, who has written to the Prime Minister to ask for more stopping sites, to ensure Travellers are protected in their right to a home.

Numerous Gypsy, Roma and Traveller organisations, with support from other civil society organisations, have made public their opposition to the Government's response to the consultation on powers for dealing with unauthorised encampments. There is specific concern about the unnecessary increase in punitive eviction powers. Given that a nomadic way of life is central to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultural and ethnic practice, criminalising trespass essentially means criminalising Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. A lack of suitable accommodation also has a negative impact on health, well-being and access to services. We urge the Home Office to work collaboratively with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to listen to the concerns of the community and address the gaps in accommodation provision. We also ask that you meet with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller representatives to discuss their concerns.

The Jewish community stands in solidarity with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community in eliminating prejudice and ensuring no one is denied the right to a home.

Yours sincerely,



Mia Hasenson-Gross

Executive Director, René Cassin

Dr Edie Friedman - Executive Director, JCORE

Jess Baker, Leeds JSoc Inter-Community Officer

LJY-Netzer

Matt Plen, Chief Executive, Masorti Judaism

Nina Freedman, President of Bristol JSoc

Professor Margaret Greenfields, René Cassin Advisory Council

Rabbi Adam Zagoria-Moffet, St. Albans Masorti Synagogue

Rabbi Aaron Goldstein, Chair, Conference of Liberal Rabbis and Cantors and Senior Rabbi,
Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue

Rabbi Alexandra Wright

Rabbi Colin Eimer, Emeritus Rabbi, Sha'arei Tsedek, North London Reform Synagogue

Rabbi David Mason, Muswell Hill United Synagogue

Rabbi Dr Barbara Borts, Honorary Research Associate, Dept of Anthropology, Durham University and
Honorary Research Fellow, Leo Baeck College

Rabbi Dr Margaret Jacobi

Rabbi Elli Tikvah Sarah, Brighton and Hove Progressive Synagogue

Rabbi Herschel Gluck OBE

Rabbi Janet Darley

Rabbi Jeffery Newman

Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg

Rabbi Larry Tabick

Rabbi Roderick Young

Rabbi Roni Tabick

Rabbi Sybil A. Sheridan

Rabbi Sylvia Rothschild

Rabbi Warren Elf, Southend and District Reform Synagogue

Rebecca Lewis, Sabbatical Officer, Union of Jewish Students

René Cassin – AJA 2019 Fellowship Programme

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Tzelem- the Rabbinic Call for Social and Economic Justice in the UK