



**INTERNATIONAL ROMANI  
UNION**  
Office of the President of IRU  
Normunds Rudevičs



Address: Doma laukums 8a, RIGA, LV-1050  
Phone/Fax: +371 67554222  
Mob.phone: +371 27771814  
e-mail: normunds.rudevics@gmail.com  
www.iru2020.com

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**To His Holiness Pope Francis**

**VATICAN**

**Re: ROMA WORLD FESTIVAL 2017 – 2018**

**Your Holiness**

Being an ancient nation, Roma (Gypsies) have no land of their own, they inhabit different countries, both contributing to and drawing from the local culture. There are about 20 million of Roma nationals in Europe alone, they constitute the biggest minority. The atrocities committed by the Nazi regimes during Second World War resulted in about 2 and a half million of Roma victims, they were led hand in hand together with Jews and other minorities into the gas chambers, hunted down and murdered in the woods.

The tragic history of this nation is at times forgotten, and the general attitude towards Roma is bordering along neglect, arrogance towards them, xenophobic themes. Roma are underprivileged, misrepresented and despite being settled in their majority, are nevertheless in a state of an eternal journey, not associating themselves with any land, possessing their unique philosophy of life. We admire your Holiness for the incessant work you do to make the world a better and more peaceful place.

Roma are and were always against any aggression, regarding art and music as their highest achievements, thus creating a channel to relate to the surrounding nations. By recognising Roma artistically, we create a reality in which we treat them equally and with respect, as they have contributed immensely to the world cultural heritage we all enjoy.

International Romani Culture Festival – **Roma World** ([www.romaworld.eu](http://www.romaworld.eu)) has been running for two years in Latvia, attracting Roma artists from 16 countries and being a very successful enterprise. Roma World is partnered with MEZZO TV to broadcast the events to 55 countries of the world. International Romani Union, uniting Roma from 47 countries of the world is the patron of the Festival and as for today it is world's biggest Roma culture festival.

It is a natural progression to take the model of the Roma World Festival and to make it travel through major capitals of Europe with free concerts by the best of Roma artists from all over the world, attracting massive attention – up to 100 000 spectators in each chosen capital. The Roma World Festival is more than a cultural music event. It serves an important purpose of showcasing the art of Roma people, reminding of their existence and sending the message of peace and tolerance to all. It is our hope that European Commission and mayors of European capitals will support our idea.

We sincerely hope for your blessing of our initiative. It is our dream to have Roma World event taking place in Rome at St Peter's Square in 2018 on International Roma Day, with Your address to the crowds. It would be a great honour to have Your Holiness joining us in our message of peace and love. From there we hope to set on a journey through the capitals of Europe as part of the project Roma World Tour.

We would be delighted to meet with Your Holiness at any convenient time in 2017.

With all best wishes

***Dr. Normunds Rudevics***

The President of International Romani Union [www.iru2020.com](http://www.iru2020.com)

***Mr. Telman Guzhevsky***

Director of ROMA WORLD Festival [www.romaworld.eu](http://www.romaworld.eu)