

## A Gypsy Conference in Kalliola

**"Every country could benefit from the Roma in many ways, but it depends on whether one manages to lead the activity in such a way that the cooperation benefits everyone", said Veijo Baltzar at the opening ceremony of the International Gypsy Conference on Thursday at the Kalliola Institute in Helsinki. The purpose of the conference is to bring together those who are actively working towards the Roma issue in other countries and to clarify the position of the Gypsies in different countries.**

The opening speech was delivered by Heimer Virkkunen, Chairman of the Board of the Gypsies Mission Society. The Minister of Social Affairs, J.E. Partanen, the patron of the conference, brought the welcoming words on the behalf of the government. He stated that the Gypsy population should be equal with other populations and be given the same opportunity to participate in the common affairs of their country.

Minister Partanen then said he was pleased that the social, civilizational and economic problems of the Gypsies were at the centre of the conference.

### New studies and dedication

"New research is needed to find out the educational issues and social status of the Gypsies. Only then would the government be able to come up with a comprehensive solution to the problem", said Veikko Piirainen.

Piirainen reviewed the history of Finnish Gypsies as well as studies conducted on them. He felt that the Gypsies are a Finnish minority and developmental problem for the entire country.

Reverend Pentti I. Hissa recalled the 1958 Synod of the Churches' 16-item proposal for congregational work with Gypsies.

Reverend Hissa also mentioned the Roma summer camps, having started with only one in 1963 and later expanding to 20 as of this year. The number

of participants has risen from 52 to 1000. The purpose of these camps is to build connections with the Roma community. In these camps, Gypsies also have the opportunity to attend confirmation school.

"Of course, we also see that the goal should not be these camps, but that we should find opportunities for more long-term operations," states Hissa.

**"Enough research, it is time to take action"**

"Studies have been taking place for a long time now, and it is of no use to us. After all, it goes without conducting any research that we need schooling, food, and housing. I cannot understand why research is a top priority," said Veijo Baltzar.

"Of course, I will not underestimate the value of research, but studies alone are not enough. It is time to take action," author Baltzar stated.

"We Gypsies should not be fully equated with our host nation, we should be allowed to have our independence and our own culture. If a Gypsy completely detached themselves from their culture, the confidence of the entire tribe will be weakened. Being a civilised Gypsy is better than becoming a white Gypsy," Baltzar continued.

Baltzar stated that the Roma have been more positively attended to recently. "There are a number of reasons for this, but perhaps the most important thing is that people have got rid of their distinctly conservative mindsets and have now recognised that the issue at hand is about people." The thoughts that the Gypsies are descendants of Cain with a compelling urge to steal and need to wander pumping through their veins.

The conference will run through to Sunday. On Friday, Dr Miklos Tomka will do a presentation on the Gypsies in Hungarian society.