



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt, Hon, Sir Lindsay Hoyle,
Speaker of the House of Commons,
London,
SW1A 00A.

26 January 2021

SENT VIA EMAIL

Dear Mr Speaker,

Re: Language used by parliamentarians to describe Gypsy and Traveller communities

I write to you in my capacity as Co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma, to draw attention to some of the stigmatising language used by parliamentarians to describe Gypsy and Traveller communities. With the Police Powers and Protection Bill anticipated to reach parliament in the coming weeks, instances of discriminatory and demonising language are likely to escalate.

Examples of the type of language I refer to include the repeated use of warfare language to describe encampments, such as ‘incursions’ or ‘invasions’, and the constant conflation of the existence of nomadic communities and anti-social behaviour and criminal activity. Included in the text of this letter you will find specific examples of inflammatory and problematic language used by parliamentarians in the House which I hope you will agree is unacceptable.

“...causes a huge amount of heartache to those law-abiding citizens in the settled community who have to deal with it...”

“...which falls on hard-working taxpayers...”

“...a big Traveller problem”

“...an expensive menace...”

Martin Docherty-Hughes MP
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“...people in the UK who repeatedly suffer from being besieged by Gypsy and Traveller communities.”

“This year Surrey has been particularly plagued by groups who descend on open land...”

Invariably, derogatory comments about Gypsies and Travellers in parliament are made in the context of the existence of encampments and given that Government are soon to announce the results of the consultation: ‘Strengthening police powers to tackle unauthorised encampments’, I am concerned there will be an escalation of this kind of derogatory language among MP’s in the House.

Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Scottish and Welsh Gypsy Travellers are all defined ethnic groups and entitled to protection from discrimination under equality legislation. Given the scale of hostility and the impact of this on already marginalised groups and on community relations, I ask that in your role as Speaker you will ensure that MPs exercise their freedom responsibly on this sensitive matter and moderate their language when discussing Gypsy and Traveller communities in Parliament.

In light of the issues above, I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the matter, along with a representative of the Traveller community if you are agreeable. I hope you will agree to this request, as I would value your advice on how we can tackle this behaviour.

Slàinte, sonas agus beartas,

Martin Docherty-Hughes
Co-Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies Travellers and Roma

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