

UNIHRD Holocaust Remembrance Press Release

Holocaust remembrance in Wellington

The serene rural surroundings at the Jewish Cemetery, Makara, were backdrop for the observance of United Nations International Holocaust Remembrance Day in Wellington on 27 January.

In breezy sunshine, Mayor of Wellington Justin Lester, German Ambassador H E Gerhard Thiedemann, and Race Relations Commissioner Dame Susan Devoy made strong statements on upping the opposition to hate speech, as well as the need for remembrance to also include personal commitment to individual action.

A major theme was the 70 years since the 1947 Nuremberg trials of doctors and lawyers who were complicit in Nazi Germany's devastating anti-Jewish policies.

The German ambassador referred to those trials, their influence on subsequent international law, and the setting up of the International Nuremberg Principles Academy. It is dedicated to the promotion of international criminal justice and human rights.

"In a world today that seems darker, with hate and intolerance on the rise, it's easy to fear that we are forgetting the hard won lessons of history," said Mayor Justin Lester. "All of us have a moral responsibility to stand up to hate, to intolerance, to injustice. We all have a role to play."

Dame Susan Devoy issued a strong warning against normalizing hatred. She singled out online hatred as a place to start, saying: "I believe we need better restrictions when it comes to the online forums, comments sections on some media outlet websites as well as their social media accounts."

"Free speech is one thing," Dame Susan stressed. "Hate speech is another."

Holocaust survivors, MPs, human rights officials, an interfaith representative, and a Jewish lawyer and doctor led those present in laying a stone at the Holocaust Memorial.

At the Parliamentary reception that followed, there were short addresses from Chris Bishop MP; Chair of the NZ National Commission for UNESCO Robyn Baker; human rights lawyer Sonja Cooper; and Berlin-born doctor Dr Susanna Williams.

Winner of the annual Paul Seideman Essay Competition, on a Holocaust topic, was 16-year-old Aisha Fariz – a student at Macleans College, Bucklands Beach, Auckland; in Year 10 when the essay was submitted.

Aisha read her winning essay to the audience, which included Auschwitz survivor Paul who endowed the competition.

On display next to the reception in Parliament's Banquet Hall was the very moving exhibition "The Anguish of Liberation as Reflected in Art 1945-47," made available by the Yad Vashem Art Collection in Jerusalem. This will be on display later at the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand, in Wellington, and elsewhere.

Similar UN International Holocaust Remembrance Day events also took place in Auckland, Hamilton and Christchurch.

Ends



Dr Susi Williams and lawyer Phillip Green share their remembrance contemplation after laying stones at the Holocaust Memorial, Makara Cemetery, Wellington on UN International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Photo: Sarah Williams



Chris Bishop MP, essay competition prizewinner Aisha Fariz, and 89-year-old Auschwitz survivor Paul Seidman who endowed the competition, at Parliament on UN International Holocaust Remembrance Day.