

United Nations international Holocaust Remembrance Day, 27 January 2021

MTG Napier Key note address Kristopher Clancy

Tēnā koutou ki a koutou kua tae mai nei ki te tautoko te kaupapa o tēnei wa. Erev tov'bruchim habaim. Good evening, and welcome. Tonight, we come together to honour the lives of those lost in the Holocaust and to pay homage to the resilience of the survivors and refugees. The choosing of January 27 as the day in which the world gathers to honour the victims of the Holocaust is a significant day. 76 years ago, the Soviet Army marched through the gates of Auschwitz-Birkenau, coming in under those ironic words "Arbeit macht frei." Work Makes One Free. The world would soon come to know the extent of the lie to which the victims of the Holocaust were subjected to and the horrors they suffered. Torture. Starvation. Murder. Most people know this portion of history, know the camps and the events that took place there. Yet, this is only one part of the entire devastation that is "The Holocaust."

Long before the first transports of Jews began to concentration camps and death camps, the hold of Nazi ideology took root in central Europe. Jews, seeing the danger on the horizon, looked elsewhere for refuge, going to such places as the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and here to New Zealand. By 1938, New Zealand had received, and rejected, 1,731 applications from Jewish refugees. As New Zealand declared war on Nazi Germany and closed their borders, only around 1,100 refugees would be granted clemency. Tens of thousands of Jews were discouraged from applying for entry, leaving them at the mercy of the Nazi regime that had stated loudly, and unequivocally, their intent to destroy European Jewry.

The end of World War II in Europe on May 8 did not signify the end of the suffering of those who had survived this monstrosity. For survivors, the rebuilding of their lives began with uncertainty. Millions of Europeans found themselves flung far from their country of origin, stuck in Displaced Persons camps set up by the Allies after liberation of Nazi concentration camps. During this time, survivors began to rebuild their lives by creating new families, art, music, political institutions, schools, and so much more. Their resiliency in the face of such hardships encapsulated the Jewish proverb "Am Yisrael Chai", "The Jewish People Live." As survivors began to find new homes in other countries, New Zealand was at the top of the list for many, as "New Zealand was the farthest place away from our memories."

These new refugees did not just make New Zealand their home, they contributed to the fabric that makes up New Zealand society. From Hans Klisser, founder of New Zealand's famous bread Vogel's to Clare Galambos-Winter, a thirty-year veteran of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, the mark these refugees left on New Zealand is bright. The refugees that settled in New Zealand came from all walks of life, levels of religious observance, and experiences during the Holocaust. They are united in their hopes for a

better, safer life here in New Zealand, and the mark they have left, both big and small on our nation. Creating new life, far from their shores of their birth, these refugees embody the best that is our country. Still, the insidious beast that is antisemitism, hatred, and white supremacy have made their way here. On March 15, 2019, the effects of this hatred was brought to reality in the form of a terrorist attack against the Muslim community in Christchurch. This attack was not just an attack against an immigrant community or a minority faith. It was an attack on the very foundations of New Zealand democracy and cultural values. In the words of MLK, “darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.” Individually and collectively, we must reject the ideals that one race or one faith is superior to another. New Zealand is a better place because of our differences. It is a better country because of its refugees and those who have come here to rebuild their lives in safety and freedom.

As an immigrant myself to New Zealand, I understand the need to rebuild one’s life in a far away land. Growing up in America, “the land of the free”, did not mean I was free from the prejudices that plague this world. Whether it was from being the only Jew in my school in the Bible belt to being an openly gay teacher, I know first-hand the dangers of being complacent. I will never forget the first time I had a student tell me that I was going to hell because I was Jewish or being in Year 13 and having “Hitler Should Have Succeeded” on my locker. Coming to New Zealand, being able to walk hand in hand with my husband down the street, it is never far from my mind how quickly public opinion can change and how dangerous it can become for minority groups. The lessons of the Holocaust are not just personal for me because of family and religious connection, they are personal for me because of my own experiences with hatred and bigotry, and like other immigrants to New Zealand, we know all too well how easily it is for safety and freedoms to be taken away.

Today, the HCNZ works to bring these lessons to New Zealanders throughout our various programmes. From our onsite programmes that give teachers and students a chance to learn about different aspects of the Holocaust in depth, to our new Just One Week Campaign and Teaching Trunks that bring Holocaust education directly to the classroom. We provide these educational offerings, as well as events such as this, with the help of our army of volunteers and the hard work of first- and second-generation survivors who are committed to remembering the victims of the Holocaust and telling their stories. Soon, we will live in a world without survivors who can tell their stories, making each one of us the standard bearers against Holocaust denial and distortion. It is with the generous support of our donors that HCNZ is at the forefront of this fight, working to educate each and every New Zealand student.

As I was putting my speech together, I was searching for the right words to express the proper take away message from today. How does one adequately, reverently, speak about such horrors? We often speak about “Never Again” and still, we know that genocide has happened again. Remembrance, without action, is fruitless. Commemoration without

change rings hollow. Too often, we find ourselves in our own world and our own problems, forgetting how interconnected we have truly become. We keep our heads down and ignore the pain and suffering of those around us, believing that someone else will take care of it. Someone else who has the time. Who has the ability. Who knows the way. Yet we forget, as Elie Wiesel so succinctly put it, “Silence never helps the oppressed, only the oppressor.” It is within each of us to do something to stand against the rising tide of hate that is ever present on our shores. Whether it’s reporting hate graffiti on buildings or helping to stop the chants of white supremacists, it is in each of us to be aware and act.

It was with this in mind, that I found my answer in a Waitangi Day proverb:

“Ko ngā pae tawhiti whāia kia tata. Ko ngā pae tata whakamaua kia tina.”
“The potential for tomorrow depends on what we do today.”

Today, make the decision not to ignore when someone around you is being belittled or degraded. Today, make the pledge that you will give a voice to the voiceless and help tell their stories so that we never forget them. Today, make the pledge that you will stand up against hate and truly embody the words “Never Again.”

Ngā mihi nui. Todah rabah. Thank you.

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