

## Remembering for the future – UN International Holocaust Remembrance Day in New Zealand

Monday 27th January, commemorations in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch, saw Holocaust survivors, their descendants, politicians, members of the diplomatic corps, and hundreds of Jews and non-Jews turn out in the heat, wind and rain to take the time to reflect and remember the 6 million Jewish lives that were murdered in the Holocaust, and the millions of other victims of the Nazi Third Reich. 27 January 2020 marked not only the annual United Nations International Holocaust Remembrance Day but also the seventy-fifth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by the Red Army.

HCNZ was honoured to host Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern at the Auckland event where over 400 people heard her express the need for care for one another. “We must look at one another with humanity and kindness. We must counter acts of brutality and violence with compassion and empathy,” she said.

Taika Waititi, in a video message from Los Angeles, spoke about the need for Holocaust education and the imperative to remove hate for love. In a further video message, Christine Leunens, author of *Caging Skies*, the inspiration for the movie *Jojo Rabbit*, conveyed the use of literature to engage people with the events of the Holocaust.

One aspect of the nation-wide commemorations was acknowledging the tragic rise of antisemitism in New Zealand and around the world, and reflecting on what this means for us all, with Deborah Hart, HCNZ Chair, expressing “Today as we remember the murder of six million Jews – including 1.5 million Jewish children – the lessons of the Holocaust are more important than ever. Remembering the Holocaust teaches us we must fight antisemitism, intolerance and hatred through education.”



Hon Jenny Salesa, Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern PM, HCNZ Board Chair Deb Hart & HCNZ CEO Chris Harris

In Wellington, commemorations at both Makara cemetery and Parliament brought together a total of approximately 375 attendees combined. Russian ambassador H.E. Georgii Zuev spoke of the huge carnage which must never be repeated, while Rick Sahar gave a moving account of his Polish father's liberation from Auschwitz by the Red Army and subsequent years of fulfilment which were not without difficulties.

The effect that messages from the Holocaust have on present-day New Zealand were reflected in Race Relations Commissioner Meng Foon's announcing his plans for increased action against bullying in schools. This parallels the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand's ongoing education campaign: "Be an Upstander, not a Bystander", which draws on the lessons to be learned from the rise of antisemitism in Nazi Germany under the Third Reich.

An impromptu presentation underscored the message of being an Upstander, when Matthew Smith, Chair of the Wellington Progressive Jewish Congregation, presented a certificate of appreciation on behalf of the Jewish community and the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand, to Eckhardt Reyneke - acknowledging the actions of the young tradesman, who, a few days earlier, with his colleagues (unable to be present), painted over the swastikas graffitied outside of Temple Sinai, next door to where they were working. His action as an Upstander was warmly applauded.

At the Parliament reception, hosted by the Hon Grant Robertson, child survivor Vera Egermayer recalled her emotions at the time of liberation by the Soviet Army from Terezin camp near Prague. Her childhood experiences of antisemitism, incarceration and 'liberation' have influenced much of her life. The Mayor of Wellington, Andy Foster, reaffirmed his support for the adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism, and the Chairperson of the NZ National Commission for UNESCO, Robyn Baker, explained youth education initiatives that UNESCO is taking.



Hon Grant Robertson, Holocaust survivor Paul Seideman, HCNZ Board Deputy Chair Miriam Bookman & student winners of the Paul Seideman Annual Composition Award

Minister Robertson presented the prizes to the three secondary school student winners of an annual essay competition on a Holocaust topic which Paul Seideman, a 92-year-old survivor of many camps including Auschwitz, and liberated from Dachau, has endowed, in Paul's presence.

While in Christchurch the event was held at the Botanic Gardens, with the support of the city council and the World Peace Bell Association. The Hon Dr Megan Woods was joined by members of the city council, and the Jewish and non-Jewish Canterbury community. The day took on a further significance, as the tragedy of March 15, 2019, whilst remembered in all cities on this day, was keenly and poignantly remembered here. Prayers were led by Rabbi Dir Bitton from the Chabad of Canterbury and the Peace Bell was rung. Here, as in all regions the message rang clear, to combat prejudice, discrimination and apathy.



Rabbi Dir Bitton

In Hamilton, an uplifting gathering was held beside the tree of remembrance in the Memorial Park; a tree which serves as a memorial to all who perished in the Holocaust and “serves as a living reminder of the evils of discrimination, oppression and genocide”.

Sylvie Bolstad from the Waikato Jewish Association spoke on the significance of UN Holocaust Remembrance Day and attendees present were invited to share a personal recount, poem or song. A candle was lit and prayers were shared to conclude the occasion, after which a community picnic was held to signify the hope for the future.



As Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern stated in Auckland, as we “reflect on the Holocaust and how we can prevent the persecution of others in the name of hatred again”, with thanks to the work and commitment to Holocaust education by Holocaust survivors such as Bob and Freda Narev, and the work of the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand, “it is incumbent on all of us [to remember]” and to continue the dialogue on how we can “foster a sense of safety & security, freedom & inclusion” in Aotearoa.

The Holocaust Centre of New Zealand is committed to combating antisemitism, discrimination, prejudice and xenophobia, and to embracing the philosophy of always being an Upstander never a bystander. We encourage all New Zealanders to join us in this, as we pledge “Never Again”.

*UN International Holocaust Remembrance Day in New Zealand is co-sponsored by the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand, the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO, the New Zealand Human Rights Commission, The Wilson Funeral Home and city councils in Wellington, Auckland, and Christchurch, with support from regional Jewish organisations & congregations.*