



## UN International Holocaust Remembrance Day 2022

### Aotearoa New Zealand Remembers

On 27 January, across Aotearoa New Zealand, the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand (HCNZ) held commemorations for the United Nations International Holocaust Remembrance Day (UNIHDR) in Wellington, Auckland, Hamilton, Nelson, and Christchurch. This day was delegated by the United Nations in 2005, as the international day for remembering the victims of the Holocaust. It coincides with the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp by the Soviet Army in 1945.

The theme for this year's commemorative events was "Resistance". In all cities we were reminded that resistance comes in many forms and even the smallest actions can make a big difference. Speeches highlighted that the forces of antisemitism, hatred, and discrimination can and do rear their ugly head to strike at the heart of our communities. This can happen at any time, anywhere, and in the most cultured societies. HCNZ and all who took part in the commemorations, recommitted themselves to fighting Holocaust distortion and denial, racism, discrimination, and apathy.

The event in Auckland, held at the Auckland War Memorial Museum, recognised the role of the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) as part of the Allied effort to defeat the Nazis and their collaborators. The Chief of Army, Major General John Boswell, spoke about members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> New Zealand Expeditionary Force and the 28<sup>th</sup> Māori Battalion capture of Trieste, in northern Italy. This victory led to the Nazis fleeing the concentration camp at Risiera di San Sabba.

The daughter of 28<sup>th</sup> Māori Battalion member, Private Tahu Potiki Hopkinson, spoke about her father being haunted by not being able to help the Jewish people more. Both the NZDF and Private Hopkinson were thanked by Holocaust Centre of New Zealand Chair, Deborah Hart, for their courage and helping the Jewish people.

Reflecting on this year's theme, Auckland Holocaust survivor Vera Krukziener spoke about the amazing acts of bravery by her own parents, the Carmelite nuns of Budapest and Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg which saved her life.

In Christchurch, speakers at the New Zealand World Peace Bell unfortunately had to contend with protests against the current Covid restrictions. Sarah Pallet, MP for Ilam, Imam Gamal Fouda, Councillor Jimmy Chen, second-generation Holocaust survivor Ben Kepes, and the Dean of Christchurch Cathedral Very Reverend Lawrence

Kimberley all spoke eloquently, whilst advocating for a civil reflective ceremony, devoid of Holocaust misappropriation, such as that exhibited by protestors. A special feature of the ceremony in the Botanic Gardens was the ringing of the Peace Bell six times, in honour of the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust and the millions of other victims of the Nazis and their collaborators.

The first ever UNIHRD event in Nelson was planned and organised by Nelson's Jewish community leaders, Richard, and Maxine Noar, with significant involvement from the wife of the Honorary Consul of Austria Martina Schneider-Leisser, and with the warm support of Nelson's Deputy Mayor, Judene Edgar.

Fifty people attended, under Covid-restricted conditions, and were much moved by the lighting of six candles – representing the six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust – by six children from the Jewish community. This linked with the comments from the Deputy Mayor's keynote speech about the need for the messages from the Holocaust to be passed on to subsequent generations, to ensure that "Never Again" has real meaning.

HCNZ hosted the Hamilton commemoration at the Waikato Museum. Attended by the Mayor of Hamilton, members of the Waikato Jewish Community, as well as representatives from the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO, New Zealand Human Rights Council and the Consulate of the United States of America, this event spoke to the theme of resistance carrying on from the Holocaust to modern day. Mayor Paula Southgate spoke about Holocaust distortion used in discourse around Covid-19 and the health measures taken by governments, as well as the need for vigilance against the rise in antisemitism and hatred in Aotearoa New Zealand. USA Consul Sarah Nelson, in her first New Zealand public event, reiterated the commitment of the United States to combating antisemitism and ensuring that no matter where it rears its ugly head in the world, the United States would be at the forefront in stamping out hatred and providing support to communities worldwide. Rachel O'Connor, Lead Advisor to Race Relations Commissioner Meng Foon, rededicated the Human Rights Commission to supporting the Jewish and minority communities in stopping hatred and discrimination nationwide.

HCNZ Education Director Kristopher Clancy, the MC for the event in Hamilton, delivered a personal keynote testimonial with family connections to the theme, relating how the act of resistance did not have just one look or outcome, but instead was on individual, communal, and national scales, all culminating in the defeat of the Nazis and their collaborators. Mr Clancy called for action from each of the audience members, saying "[i]t is to each of us that we guarantee action continues and that the Holocaust is not lost to the annals of history, one of many volumes of events that is given only cursory glances in a high school classroom." This was followed by a particularly moving candle

lighting by local student Rotem Malal - the six candles were lit in representation of the Jewish communities, Roma and Sinti communities, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, mentally and physically handicapped, and political prisoners.

The service at the Holocaust Memorial in the Jewish cemetery at Makara, outside Wellington, preceded the Parliamentary reception. In the spirit of the theme of resistance speakers shared their personal stories, experiences, and what resistance meant for them. They showed that resistance can come in any shape and form and by anyone if they choose to stand up to wrongs.

Speakers at Makara included Eva Woodbury, whose father saved the lives of 16 Jews, including her mother, in hiding in Poland, and Boyd Klap CNZM QSO, a member of the Dutch resistance, and current Chair of Anne Frank NZ. Wellington Mayor Andy Foster also delivered an impassioned address.

A special feature across the nation was the involvement of children and youth. Here at Makara and in other cities the NZ National Commission for UNESCO Youth Leaders read the UNESCO Director-General's message, emphasising "our shared responsibility to protect the truth, and to keep alive the memory of all those who suffered under the Nazi regime..."

The ceremony was led by Jeremy Smith with dignity, respect, and sensitivity. It concluded with diplomats representing the Allied countries that defeated the Nazis and the collaborators laying stones to honour and commemorate the victims. The final stone was laid together by the Israeli Ambassador Ran Yaakoby and German Deputy Head of Mission Dr Michael Feiner as a symbol that we remember, together, and we promise, together, that we will never forget or let it happen again.

At the Parliamentary reception, those present saw a video tribute to New Zealand Holocaust survivors who had died during the past year, with a special mention of Paul Seideman z"l, who endowed the annual competition in his name, for compositions on a Holocaust topic - this being the first commemoration and prize giving without him being present.

With the theme of resistance, an example was shared by the Kiwi descendants of a Dutch couple, later named as Righteous Among the Nations. They had been members of the Dutch Resistance, and amongst their many actions, hid a Jewish child during the Holocaust. As in other regions, the lighting of six candles was a highlight - with candles lit by Holocaust survivors and descendants, members of the diplomatic corps, member of the LGBTQI+ community, and Human Rights Chief Commissioner Paul Hunt.

In her speech the Secretary-General for the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO, Vicki Soanes, stated that "UNESCO reconfirms its unwavering commitment to

counter antisemitism, racism, and other forms of intolerance that may lead to group-targeted violence". Other highlights were the world-first public performance of the Partizaner Song (Partisans' Song) sung in te reo Māori (translated\* by Hēmi Kelly (Ngati Maniapoto, Ngati Tahu-Ngati Whaoa), of AUT), and the presentation of the Paul Seideman competition winning entries. This year's prize winners were announced by event host, Hon Grant Robertson, Deputy Prime Minister, who also spoke of how impressed he was by the personal testimonies at the preceding Makara commemoration, and ended by referring to the theme of resistance, saying: "Each of us knows the moment in our lives, in our days, when perhaps we turned away from those moments when we could show that individual resistance; and each of us knows that we can and should do better in those moments."

*Commemorations in Aotearoa New Zealand were made possible thanks to the following partners, the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO, Ministry for Ethnic Communities, Auckland War Memorial Museum, Astor Foundation, New Zealand Human Rights Commission, Wilson Funeral Home, World Peace Bell Association, Canterbury Education Services, Council of Jewish Women, and the City Councils of Wellington, Auckland, Hamilton, Nelson, and Christchurch.*

\*The Partisans' Song initiative is led by the WE ARE HERE! Foundation of Australia.

Photos, videos and speeches can be viewed at

<https://www.holocaustcentre.org.nz/commemorations.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFwSdMLZvRMgzX2jhmQ9nKQ>

<https://www.holocaustcentre.org.nz/speeches.html>

Winning student compositions can be found at

<https://www.holocaustcentre.org.nz/annual-composition-prize.html>