

**United Nations International Holocaust Remembrance Day Speech**  
**Deborah Hart, Chair, Holocaust Centre of New Zealand**  
**27 January 2021**

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Tena koutou katoa, shalom. Your Excellency, The Rt Hon Dame Patsy Reddy, Your Worship, Hon. Phil Goff, Members of Parliament, members of the diplomatic corps, councillors, survivors and survivor families, ladies and gentlemen.

Every year, we come together to remember and honour the victims and survivors of the Holocaust.

This year we focus on the resistance and resilience of survivors.

67 years ago my family came to New Zealand – my mother Inge Woolf, who became the founding director of the HCNZ, her Mum, Grete Ponger and her young brother – John. They came to join family – Teddy Stiassny, Paul Stanton and their families.

My mother recalls the terrifying day the Nazis marched into Vienna on 15 March 1938, her home surrounded by neighbours waving swastikas and welcoming Hitler's army.

My Czech grandfather, Evzen Ponger had been through pogroms and knew what was happening. Listening to Austrian Chancellor Shusnigg handing over power to Hitler, he asked the family, "What are we waiting for?"

There came a knock on the door in the middle of the night. Brown shirts demanded Omama's brothers Paul, Karl and Theo open the family motorbike and sewing machine shop. Everything was looted and the family was poor overnight.

My mother, Opapa and Omama moved to Prague, as it had not yet been overrun. By then Omama's brothers had all escaped – Karl to Palestine and Teddy and Paul trekking secretly by night over the border.

But Teddy's wife, Bertl had no passport, so she was stuck in Vienna. She looked a little like my grandmother. So Opapa returned to Vienna and using Omama's passport, Bertl and Opapa posed as husband and wife, so Bertl could escape.

A Lutheran Church in Myjava, was converting Jews to try and save them. My mother remembers knelling between her parents in a dark church and being baptised. Omama was so ashamed of doing this, she never spoke of it.

They spent the last of their money on a return flight at a time when Omama, characteristically positive, said, "only film-stars flew."

But the flight to freedom left from Berlin. So that's where they went. The train trip from Prague to Berlin, was the last day they could use their passports, the day before Hitler's troops occupied Czechoslovakia.

My family were the only civilians in the carriage, carrying just a bag each, as if they were holidaying. Mum remembers wearing a small gold cross, as if that would save her, and was told not to cause any attention to be drawn to the family.

When they finally arrived in England, they pleaded for refugee status and thankfully were allowed to stay.

They had escaped, but they left behind cherished family – my Mother's paternal grandparents Adolf and Carlotta Ponger, murdered in Sobibor, her Aunt Rozena Pongerova, murdered in Auschwitz, her grandfather David Stiassny, beaten by the Nazis and died as a result in Vienna, her grandmother, Rosalia Stiassny who escaped to Palestine, only to be thwarted by a British blockade and who died on the Patria which was blown up in Haifa Harbour. And extended family and friends never seen again – all murdered.

And now the descendants of Grete and Evzen Ponger live in Israel, Australia and New Zealand. We survived and we thrived.

Our story is unique and utterly ordinary. It is a story that is repeated, over and over - stories of resilience, courage, and luck. Stories of anguish, despair, and murder told six million times over.

At the HCNZ, our mandate has four parts - to bear witness to the Holocaust, to remember, to educate and to act. Here's a glimpse of what we do to ensure we fulfil our mandate.

We intend that every child will learn about the Holocaust.

Last year with teaching framed for onsite, offsite and online, we taught over 10,000 students and visited 65 schools. This year, we will teach greater numbers.

We developed 7 online teaching modules.

The #Justone week campaign, endorsed by the History Teachers of NZ Association enables at least one week of Holocaust education. In 6 months we registered 236 teachers and 168 schools into the programme.

We hope we can again send NZ teachers to Yad Vashem in Israel. If not, we will continue to work with the Yad Vashem alumni, so they can teach more teachers.

A seminar to upskill teachers in Auckland is planned for 1 March and others in Wellington, Dunedin and ChCh.

A new travelling Trunk project provides schools with all the materials that they need to teach the Holocaust. The trunks were booked out for this year within a week of our offering them.

Our 6-part webinar series which averaged 50 teachers per webinar is being re-run.

The Anne Frank travelling exhibition has had over 150,000 visitors and will travel to more centres. We translated the Diary of Anne Frank into Te Reo Maori and it is continuing to be sold and used in schools.

Our 5-person staff and 40 volunteers deal with 40 student enquiries a week on average.

We are about to take possession and make available 4,000 Holocaust-related books gifted from National Library.

The Children's Holocaust Memorial with its 1.5 million buttons for each child murdered, will continue to travel the country. 120,000 people visited the memorial in Auckland last year.

This ceremony is hosted by us each year and replicated in 4 other venues throughout the country.

We want to help ensure the IHRA definition of antisemitism is accepted and we work to help all to be upstanders against antisemitism.

And .... we are working on an Auckland centre, hopefully in the Jewish Community Centre. This project will allow us to host more groups onsite and extend our reach considerably in Auckland, Northland and Waikato. We hope you will help us make that happen.

Thank you to those of you who have supported the work of the HCNZ by working with us, volunteering, speaking to schools and community groups, by becoming members – if you aren't a member, please join us. By giving us vital funds, by being our patron. We thank you for your support and ask that you continue to support us.

So many of you come from refugee stock. Your families, like mine, lost so much and so many, but were resilient and have contributed enormously to New Zealand. The HCNZ exists to tell your stories, to commemorate with you and to help guard against antisemitism. Today we especially pay homage to survivors and we also of course remember those who were not so lucky.