

United Nations International Holocaust Remembrance Day, 2019

6 KEY LESSONS:

Firstly: The Importance of Remembering

We have an obligation to remember. The systematic murder of 6 million Jews and millions of non-Jews is not an abstract statistic. We must remember and honour those who were killed and those who were saved - and to remember the righteous among the nations – the people of inherent goodness who risked their own lives to save Jewish people:

Let me paraphrase a quote from the Talmud: “Whoever saves a single life, it is as if he or she has saved an entire universe.” We are the guarantors of each other’s destiny.

The 2nd Lesson is The Responsibility to Prevent – to challenge State-Endorsed Incitement to Hatred and Genocide.

Perhaps the most enduring lesson of the Holocaust is that the genocide of European Jewry succeeded not only because of the industrial-scale of death and terror, but because of a state-sanctioned ideology of hate. The “demonisation” of the other. The Holocaust did not begin in the gas chambers — it began with words. We see this demonisation of “the other” today in Europe, the United States and indeed across the Tasman in Australia.

A 3rd Lesson: The Danger of Silence and Indifference – the Importance of Being an Upstander.

The genocide of European Jewry succeeded not only because of a government-endorsed environment of hate and industrialization of death, but because of indifference, what many call “conspiracies of silence”.

And we’ve witnessed appalling indifference and inaction about genocide in more contemporary times — Rwanda, Darfur, the Balkans, Myanmar.

Indifference and inaction always means supporting the victimizer, never the victim. Indifference in the face of evil is – in essence - acquiescence with evil.

That is why the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand has launched a major Upstander initiative – the willingness and preparedness to stand up to discrimination and prejudice in all its forms in New Zealand. It is a core philosophy that will inform and underpin everything we do in the future.

A 4th Lesson: The Responsibility to Talk Truth to Power

The Holocaust was possible not only because of the “industrialisation of genocide” — but because of the complicity of the elites. As Elie Wiesel so powerfully put it:

“Cold-blooded murder and culture did not exclude each other. If the Holocaust proved anything, it is that a person can both love poems and kill children”.

Lesson 5: The Responsibility to Educate

And this is the core purpose of the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand.

On International Holocaust Remembrance Day, let us reconsider the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust: Namely:

“We share a commitment to encourage the study of the Holocaust in all its dimensions... a commitment to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and to honor those who stood against it...a commitment to remember the victims who perished, respect the survivors still with us, and reaffirm humanity’s common aspiration for mutual understanding and justice.”

And finally Lesson 6: The Protection of the Vulnerable

The genocide of European Jewry occurred not only because of the vulnerability of the powerless, but equally, because of the powerlessness of the vulnerable. The very first group targeted for killing were disabled Jewish children.

In being Upstanders, it is our responsibility to give voice to the voiceless, to empower the powerless — be they the disabled, children, the less economically advantaged, refugees, the elderly, the victims of gendered violence.

So let this International Day of Holocaust Remembrance be not only an act of remembrance, but a remembrance to act.

**Dianne Davis, Deputy Chair
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