

**Speech at United Nations International Holocaust Remembrance Day  
Ginny Andersen, List MP, based in Hutt South  
Grand Hall, Parliament 27 January 2019**

I'm honoured to address you on UN International Holocaust Remembrance Day which is the 74<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the largest of Nazi Germany's concentration camps and killing centres.

This day remembers all those killed in the Holocaust, that is, some six million Jewish people and up to 17 million people overall, including Poles, Slavs, Soviets, Roma, political opponents, homosexuals and the disabled.

The six million Jewish people killed in the Holocaust made up two-thirds of the total Jewish population in Europe at the time.

The word 'genocide' itself was coined after the Holocaust when Rafael Lemkin lobbied the newly formed United Nations to adopt the Genocide Convention to stop such an affront to humanity from happening again.

The message from the many, many atrocities and deaths of the Holocaust was simple: "never again."

Yet, in the decades since it happened this message has not always been heeded.

In spite of the lesson of the Holocaust, in spite of the UN Genocide Convention, there have been and there continue to be genocides Cambodia, Rwanda, Darfur, Yugoslavia and Myanmar.

Due to its totality, its geographic scope, and its institutional and industrialised systemisation, the Holocaust is unparalleled by, but not completely removed from, other genocides.

We must continue to remember the events of the Holocaust and we must continue to remember its message to the world: "never again."

## **This year's message**

The organisers of today's commemoration have a special message of remembrance. We can see around us, in this hall an exhibition showing diplomats who saved peoples' lives.

Even amongst the systematic targeting and killing of Jewish people at this time, in every country that was under the control of fascism and Nazism there were individuals who behaved bravely and compassionately and who risked their own lives to save others.

These people are memorialised by Yad Vashem, the world Holocaust remembrance centre in Jerusalem. They are known as Righteous Among the Nations. Altogether there are nearly 27,000 of Righteous Among the Nations listed.

I've picked just one from those 27,000 to mention briefly today, a woman who settled in New Zealand after the war: Eleonora Sipos.

In 1950 Mrs Sipos moved to New Plymouth in New Zealand and she lived here till her death in 1988. Mrs Sipos was Czechoslovakian by birth but lived in Hungary. She was Roman Catholic.

There were a number of instances in which she acted to rescue Jewish people during the war.

In just one example, she helped a pregnant Jewish woman and the woman's two young daughters to travel to Budapest when the train was stopped by German soldiers.

The soldiers began examining the passengers. Mrs Sipos stepped forward and asked a German soldier if he could help them because the children had not slept well the night before. She said the girls were now dozing but should not be disturbed.

The soldier obliged and, carrying one of the girls, led the group into a carriage where they would not be disturbed.

Mrs Sipos went on to keep the woman as a maid in her own house and arranged for the children to be sheltered in another town.

This is just one of example of what Eleonora Sipos did to earn her place amongst the Righteous Among the Nations.

When in later years she was asked why as a Roman Catholic she risked her own safety to help save Jews, she said:

“First, because I felt a great injustice was being done against the Jewish people who had no country of their own, nowhere to go. I had, and have, many good Jewish friends.

Second, I am a Christian and a human being. All my life I have helped other people, individually and through movements such as the Red Cross, regardless of religion... one must do what is best.”

There’s a very simple message in those words: “one must do what is best.”

### **Relevance in New Zealand Today**

The Holocaust happened more than 70 years ago and half a world away from where we stand today. It is of value to remind ourselves why we commemorate it here, in New Zealand, each year.

First, the Holocaust serves as a universal reminder that we should never allow such horrors to happen again, not anywhere and not to anyone. “Never again.”

Second, the Holocaust came from the conditions in those societies, from anti-Jewish feeling that had existed for centuries.

In New Zealand we have many minorities and, it is fundamental to our identity that we use the Treaty of Waitangi as the basis of a relationship based on partnership, consultation and mutual respect.

In Europe we are again seeing the rise of far-right groups and parties; in the US we are hearing politicians advocating intolerant views against particular groups. We do not want these conditions to develop in New Zealand.

It is important that everyone understands the consequences of words, actions and policies that discriminate against others.

It is also important that everyone understands that they have a social and moral responsibility not to discriminate against others and, where we see discrimination, we have a social and moral responsibility to help those who are being discriminated against. It is these principles that led me to join the Labour Party.

We can learn from the Righteous Among the Nations and their actions that it is better to be stand up than it is to stand by. Where there is discrimination, bullying, violence, where there is suffering, if we can help, we must help.

Today because of computers, iPads, smart phones, we have untold information at our fingertips but still many have a lack of knowledge and a lack of understanding of history – even *recent* political events.

We all have gaps in our knowledge. I for one have been on a pretty steep learning curve since coming into this place.

Mostly there's no harm done; we can afford to be ignorant about a few things here and there. But some things are important.

Especially as the Holocaust falls further into the past and further into “history,” we need be sure that we remember the lesson it has left for all humans.

The Holocaust Centre of New Zealand does fantastic work with the Human Rights Commission and other organisations to teach Kiwi youth about how discrimination, bullying and violence can lead to the racism, and how that underlies the conditions that led to the Holocaust.

## **Conclusion**

Today especially, on Holocaust Remembrance Day, we remember and learn from the Holocaust, we learn from those that suffered and died in it and we learn from those that stood up against it

Recently I visited a good friend, one well versed in the trials of history and the role of religion and ethnicity has played.

One of those good friends where you pick up where you've just left off even though a few years might have passed.

I told her that I was giving this speech today and that I was daunted by the weight of the topic that confronted me.

She said “Isn't it simple Ginny, isn't it just a choice between light and dark?”

And I think she was right, as always.

Every day we need to remember and learn.

Every day we need to be brave and compassionate.

Every day we need to appreciate our differences, be they differences of religion, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, or political belief.

We need to defend the right to be ourselves, and the right of others to be different.

And on a day by day basis when given a choice, we choose light over dark.