

United Nations International Holocaust Remembrance Day – 27 January 2021

His Excellency Ambassador-designate, Ran Yaakoby, Israel

I would like to acknowledge the Holocaust Survivors present here today and those who have unfortunately passed on.

Today, the international community commemorates the 76th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz Birkenau. Defeating the Nazi war machine and evil purpose was an effort of many. We mark the ability of the international community to unite, to work for a common goal, and the duty and the imperative of the international community today to continue to work together on the basis of shared values as we face Anti-Semitism and racism, radical forces that spread chaos and destruction, hatred and fear of human dignity and humanity itself.

Here in New Zealand we also commemorate and honour the brave Jewish families who fled the atrocities of the Second World War and travelled to these shores to start a new and better life for themselves. However, it was not smooth sailing from the start. Following the Great Depression, New Zealanders were worried about immigrants taking their jobs. At that time, non-British immigrants were discouraged, and some Parliamentarians thought Jewish people would not be able to adapt into what was a much more homogenous society than the New Zealand of today.

Sadly though, anti-Semitism is a chronic disease and can be felt still, even here in New Zealand. The only vaccine to it is Education. In a recent study by the European Commission and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 80% of young Jewish people surveyed in Europe say that anti-Semitism is a problem in their country and believe it has grown in the past five years. 44% indicated that they were targeted at least once in the year before the survey, yet startlingly very few report such incidents, with 80% opting not to do so.

These findings make for grim reading. Recently published figures show us that in the year 2020, anti-Semitic incidents that were reported in New Zealand had doubled from the previous year.

We must fight anti-Semitism and I would like to thank the thirty-four countries that have already adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition

of anti-Semitism, a comprehensive definition that includes all types of contemporary antisemitism, and I call on all countries to do the same. This definition is a meaningful tool in the fight against anti-Semitism, both in education and political discourse and in the field of law enforcement. Such an effort can be followed by New Zealand joining the IHRA. Together, we will continue to fight anti-Semitism and racism, we will fight Holocaust denial and distortion, we will educate and we will remember, so that history does not repeat itself.

Among all the chaos, the State of Israel still offers a safe haven for Jews from all over the globe. In the last year alone, over 16,000 Jews, mostly from the United States and Europe have made Israel their Homeland. Israel will forever be the home of the Jewish People, it is where we Jews came from and where we return to after 2000 years of exile.

Dear New Zealand Holocaust survivors: your strength of spirit built houses and planted trees, your heroism ensured a brighter future for your children and grandchildren, where they could grow and live in this safe and free country.

May the memory of the victims of the Holocaust and those who waged war on Nazism, be forever in our hearts.

Thank you, Shalom and Ngā mihi nui.