

Hon Chris Finlayson's Address on Holocaust Remembrance Day

"Shalom and welcome to Parliament. We are here because today is United Nations International Holocaust Remembrance Day, commemorated each year on the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz/Birkenau in Poland on this day in 1945.

Last year Annette King and I represented New Zealand in Auschwitz for the 70th anniversary commemoration. It was a sombre occasion attended by a number of survivors as well as representatives of many governments. I will never forget walking from the gatehouse to the far end of the camp to lay a wreath at the conclusion of the ceremony accompanied by, among others, Josh Frydenberg MP for Kooyong and a minister in Malcolm Turnbull's Cabinet. Josh's family lost relatives in Auschwitz.

71 years have passed and the Holocaust continues to be discussed and studied. Every year there are more books and films which consider this most grotesque event in all of human history. For example, just two days ago I flew on Lufthansa from Frankfurt to San Francisco to New Zealand. I watched an outstanding German film called *The People vs. Fritz Bauer*.

This historical thriller chronicles the efforts of Fritz Bauer, the state attorney general of Hesse in West Germany, to prosecute the architects of Auschwitz. An extremely intelligent and complex individual, Bauer himself was briefly interned in Dachau and made it his life's work to bring Nazism's worst offenders to justice. The film centres around Bauer's attempts in the late 1950s to bring Adolf Eichmann to trial. Facing difficulties with some officials in the German Government, Bauer risked being charged with treason as he worked with Mossad in Israel to locate and arrest Eichmann in Buenos Aires and have him brought to justice.

This year we focus particularly on the children who died during the Holocaust.

Millions died at the hands of the Nazis. As we heard at Makara this afternoon, children were especially vulnerable. Obsessed with creating what they saw as a biologically 'pure' society, the Nazis targeted Jewish children to prevent a new generation from ever being born.

As many as a million and a half children died in the Holocaust. This number included over a million Jewish children and tens of thousands of Romani children, German children with physical and mental disabilities as well as children from Poland and the occupied Soviet Union.

Shortly you will hear from a child survivor of the Holocaust, Vera Egermayer, who spent the last months of World War Two in Theresienstadt. Before she speaks, I will talk briefly about the importance of remembering and reflecting on what happened during the Holocaust.

We cannot allow the fact that so many children died slip out of the world's collective memory. Currently in the Middle East we are seeing two familiar and destructive forces – racial hatred and religious hatred. These forces were central to the atrocities of the Holocaust and are once again bringing violence and death.

Antisemitism has not passed into history. The same hatred directed against Anne Frank and others by the Nazi Regime still exists today, merely in different forms.

This is why the stories of children in the Holocaust cannot and must not be permitted to fade into history. They compel us never to forget and always to confront this lethal obsession, the oldest hatred.

Antisemitism is a dreadful illness which destroys all who harbour it. Hate harms the hated. It also destroys those who hate. There is no exception. As we look at the world today, it is easy to become depressed. Antisemitism is back big time, religious extremism is everywhere. Can anything ever change?

Yes it can. We must be positive. Let me finish by referring to the uplifting words of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in my opinion the greatest religious thinker of our time. Last year he wrote a book called *Not in God's Name*, confronting religious violence. He ends his work with this question:

Can the world be changed? The answer is yes, and the proof is one of the most uplifting stories in the religious history of humankind: the changed relationship between Jews and Christians after the Holocaust.

Rabbi Sacks quotes Pope Francis from an open letter he wrote in September 2013 which states “*God's fidelity to the close covenant with Israel never failed, and...through the terrible trials of these centuries, the Jews have kept their faith in God. And for this we shall never be sufficiently grateful to them as Church but also as humanity.*”

Rabbi Sacks goes on to say:

This may be the first time that a pope has publicly recognised that in staying true to their faith, Jews were being loyal to God, not faithless to him. This is a statement capable of changing the world. The Church, in the West, has begun to overcome its sibling rivalry with Judaism. If it can happen between Christians and Jews, it can happen between them and Islam also.

*Today Jews, Christians and Muslims must stand together, in defence of humanity, the sanctity of life, religious freedom and the honour of God himself. The real clash of the twenty-first century will not be **between** civilisations or religions but **within** them. It will be between those who accept and those who reject the separation of religion and power. Those who believe that political problems have religious solutions are deluding themselves as well as failing to understand who Abraham was and what he represented.*

Amen to all that. As Sacks says:

*Wars are won by weapons, but it take ideas to win a peace. To be a child of Abraham is to learn to respect the other children of Abraham even if their way is not ours, their covenant not ours, their understanding of God different from ours...**Our common humanity precedes our religious differences.***

All of us have to work together to achieve to this end. We owe it to the millions of victims of the Holocaust."

- Hon Chris Finlayson, 27 January 2016