

United Nations International Holocaust Remembrance Day

Wednesday 27 January 2021

New Zealand Remembers

January 27, 2021 marked the 76th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. In Aotearoa New Zealand, one of few countries in a Covid-ravaged world still able to have large gatherings, hundreds came together across the country to remember the 6 million Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust, and the many millions of other innocent victims killed by the Nazi war machine, as well as to honour the survivors who made their way to New Zealand and contributed to the fabric of our society - the theme for this year's UN International Holocaust Remembrance Day commemorations in New Zealand being "We are still here".

In attendance were Holocaust survivors and their descendants, the Governor-General the Rt Hon Dame Patsy Reddy, Deputy Prime Minister Hon Grant Robertson, Chief Human Rights Commissioner Paul Hunt, Race Relations Commissioner Meng Foon, Robyn Baker Chair of the NZ National Commission for UNESCO, leaders, and members of the Jewish and interfaith communities, representatives of the diplomatic corps, Members of Parliament, and ex MPs, Mayors and City councillors.

Memorial prayers, songs, readings, and the lighting of 6 candles in honour of the six million murdered Jews took place in all venues. A memoriam video of NZ resident Holocaust survivors that died in the last year was also a poignant addition to the commemorations.

The Governor-General Rt Hon Dame Patsy Reddy, the patron of HCNZ, spoke in Auckland, of the lack of action by governments and other organisations in the plight of Jewish refugees seeking refuge in New Zealand after WWII, "Between 1936 and 1938, when European Jews were frantically searching for sanctuary from Nazi persecution, New Zealand rejected some 1,731 formal applications..." She also emphasised the importance of Holocaust education in New Zealand today.

At the Makara Cemetery service, Ambassador-designate for Israel Ran Yaakoby reminded guests of the duty and imperative of the international community to work together against racism and antisemitism, and of the importance of Holocaust education and remembrance.

Host of the Parliament reception, in Wellington, Deputy Prime Minister Hon Grant Robertson expressed that as a country we could do better at inclusion, and anti-racism and of how much refugees bring to the community. He spoke of HCNZ's own 4 pillars, Witness, Remember, Educate and Act, emphasising the importance to stand up to all forms of hatred, to act.

Robyn Baker, Chair of the NZ National Commission for UNESCO expressed the importance of education, the access to education, and of listening to the stories and needs of others, and the significant impact refugees make to our society.

At the Peace Bell in the Christchurch Botanic Gardens, Chief Human Rights Commissioner Paul Hunt spoke, amongst other things, of the alarming rise in anti-semitism in Aotearoa New Zealand.

HCNZ Education Director Kris Clancy urged guests in Napier, "Today, make the pledge that you will stand up against hate and truly embody the words "Never Again.""

Holocaust survivors and second-generation Holocaust survivors shared testimonies of their and their parent's experiences during the Holocaust and of settling into NZ, into a new life.

Many speakers acknowledged that New Zealand has benefited immensely from the Jewish refugees that have managed to make this country their home.

Resounding takeaways from this day were;

that whilst refugees often come to New Zealand with nothing but their hope for a better life, in return, they bring diversity, warmth, and give back in earnest to the communities that welcome them. Jewish refugees, and refugees from other groups have given much to Aotearoa. We are a better nation for them.

And that remembrance without action is simply not good enough. We must all stand against prejudice and persecution, stand together, and embrace our differences, towards a better future with respect and rights for all humanity.

UN International Holocaust Remembrance Day 2021 in New Zealand was co-sponsored by the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand, the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO, the New Zealand Human Rights Commission, The Wilson Funeral Home, Astor Foundation, Auckland War Memorial Museum, MTG Hawke's Bay and city councils in Wellington, Auckland, and Christchurch, with support from regional Jewish organisations & congregations.