

MEIR ITZCHAKI, DEPUTY AMBASSADOR OF ISRAEL

YOM HASHOAH SPEECH

ROOKWOK CEMETERY SYDNEY- MAY 1, 2011

Honored Guests, Rabbis,

Members of the community,

Survivors,

Today, we are brought together in shared grief, humility and remembrance and to acknowledge, collectively, Yom Hashoah.

The Holocaust was an inconceivable evil.

Over the course of the Third Reich, more than 6 million Jews were murdered, gassed, shot, hanged or starved to death as part of a systematic campaign of dehumanization and murder.

For the Nazis, though, the murder of Jews and other 'undesirables' represented only part of a deeper philosophy, one opposed to difference and the rights of the individual, a regime firmly committed to crushing the human spirit. In the process, the Nazis and their willing allies succeeded in dedicating the resources and powers of nations to the cold-blooded murder of innocents.

They transformed us from people to statistics, turned our houses into prisons and our neighbours into willing executioners.

They brought to the fore the very worst in man and made evil a virtue.

It is already beyond human comprehension to imagine the murder of six million living, breathing, thinking people. The nadir of human history was

achieved at the Varse Conference , when, dripping with anti-Semitism, the eradication of the Jewish people, women and children, homes and history was transformed from an ethical dilemma into a question of logistics, what they called 'the final solution.'

For the Nazis, there was no ethical dilemma in killing millions. The worldview that they propagated offered nothing but hatred, no option but victory, and made no wrongdoing inexcusable in the pursuit of absolute power and dominance. The very fact that a fellow human being could conceive and commit a crime like the holocaust demeans every member of the human race, whatever their culture or creed. As Primo Levi remarked, "I am constantly amazed by man's inhumanity to man." The great tragedy of the Holocaust today we are less amazed.

But even in those terrible times and surrounded by such evil, goodness and heroism remained. As we recognize the heroines of the Shoah, I wish to recall the story of Bertha Sperling. At 18, Bertha watched her fiancée being taken to his death. Her sister Sarah and Sarah's fiancée were also dragged off and killed. Bertha had blue eyes, blonde hair and accentless Polish. With her Polish looks, she could easily have fled and done saved herself from great danger and suffering.

It would have been impossible to expect any person, in the face of such horror, to do more than hide. Bertha did indeed move to Warsaw to mask her identity, but there she took up smuggling arms and food into the ghetto, supplies that were later used in the uprising whose anniversary falls today. At the same time, she smuggled children out of the ghetto, to safety. Even though Berta could have withdrawn and disappeared, she risked her life to oppose the Nazis.

Our sages taught that "one who saves a life is considered as if he had saved the entire world". For the many heroines, Jewish and non-Jewish who we remember today, who sought to save others, to stand firm in the face of an impossible, incomprehensible evil, who sacrificed so much- there can be no doubt that they helped to save the entire world and its many people.

Berta was my grandmother. Her story revealing only months before she perished. She fought, survived and raised the torch for Jewish survival with pride. For my grandmother, and many others, this heroism did not end with the Shoah. She survived, and committed her family to living in Israel. She knew that it was only with our own nation that we could guarantee our own future; that we would ensure that no such act could ever again occur to our people. She saw in Israel, the nation that I proudly represent, an ongoing act of heroism for the entire Jewish people.

As I stand here today as a representative of Israel, the Jewish State, I proudly resurrect the memory of her heroism and prove that Hitler and his cronies did not win. Nor, so long as we maintain their heroic legacy, shall anyone again inflict such pain upon us.

Even at this moment, we face the continued taint of this philosophy. Less than 70 years after the fall of the 3rd Reich, the world is burdened with those who deny the Holocaust and those who would deny the Jewish state, in the same breath erasing the suffering of millions and seeking to claw back the very thing that gave survivors the hope to build anew. These deniers are proof that evil remains in the world, a challenge that we are called upon to confront forevermore.

Today, as we mourn and wonder about man's inhumanity to man, let us also gratefully remember those great heroines and their brave deeds. Let their legacy be our heritage, let their memory be our beacon and most of all, Let us never forget!