

**Speech by H.E. Yuval Rotem
Ambassador of Israel**

NSW Parliament Raoul Wallenberg Centenary Commemoration
NSW Parliament House
5 September, 2012 at 10.30am

Today I speak to you professionally as an Ambassador of a people re-born from the ashes of the Holocaust.

I also speak to you personally as the grandson of a Polish-born Jew that lost the majority of his family through the destruction that befell European Jewry.

I represent a people who have come closer to extinction than any nation should ever know.

During the course of the Second World War, we lost six million souls.

Two thirds of the Jewish population of Europe were exterminated, as part of a calculated plan to decimate the Jewish nation; implemented by one of the most cultured nations the world has ever known.

The holocaust is the defining moment of modern Jewish history. Its influence and consequence still linger.

Each year, we mourn those who were the ultimate victims of prejudice and racism;
Each year, we lose a few more souls who survived the darkest period known to mankind;

And each year, we re-dedicate ourselves to never forgetting the lessons of this era.

Distinguished guests,

Perhaps one of the greatest lessons learned from this era is that bigotry and hatred are not the ultimate problems.

The most disgraceful, most shameful, and the most tragic problem is the convenience of silence; the silence that ignores the victim, validates the killer, and sanctions the act.

The great cruelties of the world are not built upon the deeds of evil people.

They grow from the heavy silence of good people.

The apex of atrocity was reached last century, because of silence.

Ideas were not challenged, methods were not tested, and hatreds were not confronted.

But within this darkness, there were individuals who cast flickers of light with their defiance;

Individuals who were not Jewish, spoke no Hebrew, and had no personal association to its culture and history;

Individuals who simply felt a profound connection to the suffering of a fellow human.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we pay tribute to Raoul Wallenberg; a diplomat, statesman and humanitarian, who accomplished one of the most extraordinary humanitarian feats in modern history.

At age 32, he was called up for a diplomatic assignment of the highest moral order – to challenge the machinery of Nazi Germany and its Hungarian allies and to seize as many lives as he could from the clutches of murderers; bringing people back from the brink of death.

Wallenberg himself defined his mission as that to 'save a nation'.

I stand before you as a living example of his success.

Because of men like Raoul Wallenberg, human history can still cling to the hope that evil can be overcome;

That it is within human capacity to draw courage from the deepest pools, at the darkest hour, to save the life of a fellow human.

This man deserved accolades of the highest order.

Yet his heroism was crowned only by tragedy.

Taken by Soviet troops, his fate remains unknown to this day.

He is a hero without a grave; yet his legacy transcends political and geographical borders, and rests in countries around the world.

Distinguished guests,

We may not know the end of his story, but we know the impact of his life.

He lit candles of hope that could not be extinguished in an otherwise dark world;

Amid a culture of fear, compliance and submission, he rose above the luxury of inaction, indifference and silence.

He had nothing to gain, and everything to lose.

Our sages tell us that to save one life, it is as if you have saved the entire world.

Wallenberg saved many worlds, universes and generations.

Distinguished guests,

Raoul Wallenberg and his story are a testament to what is good in the world.

Today we celebrate a man created in God's image, who had the courage to care.

At a time when anti-Semitism is today again on the rise, we learn from his life a lesson in standing up to racism and injustice.

He shows us that mercy and courage do not only transcend religion and nationality, they are what bind humanity together.

Marking 100 years since Wallenberg's birth ensures that his story will be remembered, his legacy recognised and his message embraced for generations to come; because though the challenges that confront us today have changed, the values we must draw on have not.

In the era of new threats, we still cannot afford the luxury of inaction, indifference and silence.

The warning championed by the great philosopher and statesman Edmund Burke, over 200 years ago still resonates today;

And I quote - 'all that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing'.

Thank you.