

Dear Friends,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am truly honoured to have been asked to deliver the closing address to the seminar we have attended today. We have heard learned speakers' discourse on subjects related to the Holocaust in Europe and Greece, dedicated in the blessed memory of Raoul Wallenberg. We have also heard about the astonishing life choices of this unusual diplomat, in setting himself in the service of others, at an hour of mortal peril, and about his even more astounding success in saving the souls of very many, by his own initiatives and by enlisting the help of few. An emblematic figure, he has come to represent the epitomy of inspired morality, of intelligent determination and dogged commitment to a very dangerous goal, which in all likelihood, in the end cost him his very life. The nobility of this man's spirit, his love of mankind and devotion to life, within a world steeped in extreme adversity, dark inhumanity and heinous murder of the innocent, has gained him a firm position in the pantheon of the immortals.

Still, the question arises, what is the meaning of all this for us today? Why is Raoul Wallenberg now and always will be relevant for us all? After all, his actions distinguish him as a hero, a man of rare courage and steadfast conviction, a man unlike most, if not all of us...But was this really so? Extensive research into the personalities and circumstances of Holocaust rescuers has revealed that they were mostly made of an average moral fabric, that they did not possess an abundant supply of heroism and courage, which they called upon, in order to save others. Quite the opposite, the vast majority of rescuers were ordinary people from all walks of life, who had the ability to think for themselves and faced with extreme situations, decided to act when action was needed. It has often taken but one free thinker to stand against the strongest tide and alter its course, as such a man can be an inspiration to others and stir them also to action and create pockets of care and humanity. Therefore, the greatest lesson we can gain from Raoul Wallenberg's life is that we all have the ability within us, to be our brother's keepers, and that even one man can make a huge difference to any final outcome. From his still unknown end, we learn that such commitment can often demand the ultimate sacrifice...

The reason we are here today, the legacy of the Holocaust, boils down to some very basic principles, intricately bound with the human condition, like a spiritual contract with only two clauses: "remember" and "never again".

The preservation of memory has shaped human societies since the dawn of time. As Jews, we are taught from infancy to tell the history of the Passover, of our people's deliverance from slavery, every year, lest it be forgotten. This is a sacred duty for all humanity: to remember the beacons of high and noble spirit,

such as Raoul Wallenberg, and hold them high for every new generation to see, to know and to understand.

We all share the same sacred duty to remember the martyrs of the Holocaust and to keep their memory alive and their voices heard, lest, if we fail and forget them, they die twice.

As a 3rd generation Holocaust Survivor, I grew up with stories of pain and anguish, of family members lost and of a way of life gone for ever. The fragility of human life and happiness became evident in the realization that the victims of the Holocaust were summarily denied the most basic human right: the right to live. The simple and most fundamental dream all people share in all times became an impossibility for them and their lives were taken in horrific ways, gruesome details of which still surface today, almost 70 years later, adding new awful pages to this singular, dark chapter in human history.

In those 70 years that followed the Holocaust, horrendous acts of mass murder and genocide have taken place in many countries, proving beyond doubt that evil always walks among us. That fear and uncertainty will always feed the humblest of our instincts and inclinations. That only constant effort and vigilance can help keep contemporary societies in a modicum of safety. Our own society needs this as much as any other. More so, in these difficult times of change and transition, of unemployment, poverty and strife, with all the extreme social and political phenomena which plague our daily lives. The new millennium that dawned in the year 2000, has so far dashed many of our hopes for a more enlightened and peaceful life on this planet down in the mud.

This invitation has been merited by our work at the Jewish Museum of Greece, in connection with Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research in our country. The JMG has conducted educational programs in its premises and in the classroom, since 1999, education seminars since 2004 and has been a permanent member of the Greek Delegation to the ITF, since the year 2000. It has created exhibitions, in house and traveling, museum cases for work in the classroom, it has given printed and audiovisual material to countless teachers, it has translated much needed methodology manuals and other related literature into Greek and has prepared multimedia applications with the living testimonies of Greek survivors at their centre. It maintains an expanding archive of oral testimonies, numbering currently more than 90, many of them unavailable in other similar archives. In the course of our Holocaust work, we have often acted to motivate, to assist and supplement the means and methods of formal education to teach our children about the Holocaust, about human rights and civic responsibility. We have also worked steadily to bring Holocaust survivors to the attention of the public and to help them speak at schools and universities.

All this effort is focused on the younger generation. We work to keep them engaged, interested, asking questions, discussing answers, analysing choices,

events and outcomes and learning...We encourage them to reject injustice and social marginalization wherever they find it and to speak up in defense of others, especially those who cannot speak for themselves. To understand that there is no shame in being a victim, but there is great shame in being a silent bystander, a passive observer of evil, as that makes one its actual accomplice... None could have said this better than Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel: "I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented". This is why we strive to help tomorrow's citizens, be more aware of the issues at hand, more alert in defending the values of humanity. We want them to have more knowledge; more respect, more flexibility of mind, more choices...

And after all, the question remains: can our feeble efforts help to achieve a level of security for our children? Can we hope to safeguard the precious vestiges of civilization that humanity has fought long and hard and repeatedly, in order to attain and keep? Can we ever succeed to protect the individuals' right to be who they are and to live their lives as they choose?

I honestly do not know...

But I do know this: we cannot stop trying ... We can never give up...

Thank you.

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