

VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE

Yom HaShoah

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Honorable Premier Gordon Campbell, Honourable Minister Moira Stillwell, Members of the Legislature, Fellow Survivors, Sons and Daughters of Survivors, Dear Friends

Only a few days ago, April 11th marked the 65th year since the liberation of Buchenwald. And only 3 weeks hence, on May 5th is a date seared in my memory, the day that Holland was liberated and Canadian tanks rolled through the streets of The Hague. I saw them, for that day I emerged from hiding after nearly 3 years with my rescuing angels, Albert and Violette Munnik and their daughter, Nora.

And my mother and father had survived elsewhere in the city, independently. How lucky, I got back my parents. How unlucky, I got back my parents. I had to leave the family I had learned to love. For a Jewish child, liberation did not feel particularly liberating.

And were my birth parents really the same parents who had courageously given me up in the hope that I would survive? Of course not. Over 3 years of fear and hunger had taken its toll. The concept of Holocaust or Shoah did not yet exist. The extent of the massacres was not yet known. But we soon learned, there was no one left alive, save one first cousin. My parents were the only survivors of their immediate families. My grandparents, aunts and uncles had all been murdered. We were alone.

Over 80% of Dutch Jews had been killed, a percentage second only to Polish Jewry. And amongst the children, the slaughter reached truly genocidal proportions – for that is the ultimate definition of genocide – the elimination of a people's future. In Nazi-occupied European countries, 93% of Jewish children were murdered. Of the 7% who survived, many were lost through continued concealment and by assimilation. We are but a fragment. And yet we are here, growing older like others. But truly we have always been old. We aged before our time. We were elderly children a long time ago.

And then a miracle, the re-establishment of the State of Israel, a Jewish homeland. Had it existed before the war, as was promised by Britain and by the League of Nations, the intensity and results of Nazi fury might have been diminished. Surely hundreds of thousands could have escaped. But we were betrayed with false promises. There was no Israel, nor were there welcoming countries.

After the war, while a sizable number of Holocaust survivors found a home in Israel, others went elsewhere. We were amongst those lucky enough to come to Canada. We arrived in Vancouver in 1951, such a beautiful city in such a wonderful country. Mind you, our realtor who helped us find a home, also took us to the British Properties in West Vancouver. We were told that Jews and Chinese were forbidden to purchase homes there.

But on the whole, Vancouver proved a welcoming place. I, the Dutch kid was allowed four strikes when learning to play baseball. That is very generous of other 10 year olds. And talk about opportunity. I held two or three jobs simultaneously, earning enough over time to buy a car, pay my UBC tuition and graduate from Medical School.

And so, thank you, Vancouver, thank you, British Columbia, thank you, Canada. What a joy to live here and become a Canadian, a Canadian like the liberators whose tanks rolled through the streets of The Hague, chasing out our occupiers. To this day, the Dutch celebrate Canadian heroism far more than do Canadians themselves.

But with all that is good and kind and decent within this country, can we rest? 65 years after the revelation of the worst that was ever done by a people to another people, are we safe yet? Are we secure? I fear not. Synagogues and Jewish schools require security that churches and mosques do not. In recent years there has been a sharp rise in anti-Semitism in the form of the vilification of Israel. And I speak not of legitimate criticism of some of Israel's political or military actions. I speak of the standards set for Israel's behaviour to which no other country is held, particularly its enemies. The attempts to de-legitimize and ultimately destroy the Jewish homeland would return Jewish life to the vulnerability of prewar Europe. Given our experiences, how can we ever be sure that our rights will be respected and upheld? We recognize our need for Israel. So do our enemies.

Amazingly, those of us who survived the Holocaust have seen in 1975, a United Nations Resolution equating racism with Zionism, the 150 year old liberation movement of the Jewish people. In effect, it labelled Holocaust survivors as racists for expressing their love and yearning for Israel. And we have seen a campaign of very effective propaganda convincing a variety of governments that Israel's capital is disputed territory when in fact, that campaign dates back to 1967, in comparison with the 3000- year Jewish history of Jerusalem.

Coinciding with these attempts to disconnect the Jewish people from their own history are such efforts as the now annually held Israel Apartheid week on Canadian campuses East and West, and initiated in Toronto. The false messages portray Israel as a colonizer and oppressor when in fact its actions are largely a response to the incursion of terrorism through infiltration by human bombs or through rocket attacks on Israeli civilians. No one

can tell me that the de-legitimization and boycotts are not Jew-hatred in a new and dangerous form. Not until it is demonstrated that truly despotic regimes are held to the same standard. As Norman Podhoretz has written, "Now the same charges that anti-Semites had always hurled at the Jews living in the Diaspora were being translated into the language of international affairs and applied to the Jewish state"

In other words, it has become permissible to make anti-Semitic statements but to disguise them as so-called "legitimate criticism of Israel". The lines have been blurred to such a degree that Israel has come to stand for the Jew of nations. The vile deceit and lies of the 1930's that resulted in the annihilation of European Jewry, have re-surfaced in contemporary life.

While Israel's record on human rights is not perfect, (neither is that of the US or Canada), Israel is not a segregated society. As Liat Collins writes, "Israel's flaws do not include deliberate discrimination based on gender, race, religion or colour. There are Arab parliamentarians, judges, doctors and professors and an even greater number of students who freely speak their minds on campuses ranging from Haifa to Beersheba----." Apartheid in South Africa was institutionalized racism legislated by dozens of laws separating whites from non-whites.

Why am I worried? Why are we worried? There has been a gradual corrosion of our security and it has not been subtle. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was prevented from speaking at Concordia University. He was cast as a right wing Israeli politician by a group of anti-Israel protestors. How does that explain the prevention of a speech by former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak shortly after? He was of course a left wing politician and the architect with President Clinton of a Peace Treaty in the year 2000, a treaty that would have met nearly all the demands of the Palestinian Authority. This is not about right or left wing politics. It is about terminating the existence of a Jewish State.

In the meantime, some leaders of Ontario's CUPE, the B.C. Teacher's Federation, and Mountain Co-op have seen fit to identify Israel as the world's #1 problem and attempted to introduce resolutions with the objective of boycotting Israel. Rwanda was of no particular concern, neither is the Sudan, Darfur, or Tibet. But Israel's security fence that has more or less successfully protected Israel's citizens, both Jews and Arabs, from gruesome deaths at the hands of human bombs, seems to be a major obstacle to Peace, even to our illustrious former head of the World Court at the Hague, Madame Justice Louise Arbour, a Canadian.

And to our dismay, we must watch 65 years after the end of the war, the Holocaust denier, President Ahmadinejad of Iran promise a new Holocaust to the Jews of Israel, including the remnants of my family, the remnants of our families. How is it possible? How is it possible that here in Canada, a group related to Pride Canada, advocates of gay rights and human rights, have promoted loathing of Israel with accusations against Israel of Apartheid? Ahmadinejad has said there are no homosexuals in Iran. We can all guess what that means.

Gays actually flee the Palestinian Authority to Israel for there they find a measure of freedom and safety. Is it possible that this group is unaware that their lives would be endangered in Iran and that their anti-Israel outbursts give comfort to their own enemies? I cannot believe they do not know. I must therefore conclude it is simply another manifestation of Jew-hatred. I fear these developments in our beautiful, mostly harmonious country.

Did you know that Canada was in Auschwitz? Yes, the inmates of Auschwitz named the area where the valuables of arriving Jews were plundered and stored, Kanada. The Kanada compound signified a place of abundance and riches. Canada existed in the imagination of camp inmates as a place of wealth and opportunity. They were right. Are we going to let a new generation of hateful people, the enemies of Jewish freedom in the guise of anti-Zionism, are we going to let them bring Auschwitz into Canada?

Our gratitude for our government here and in Ottawa is boundless. For you, Premier Campbell, to participate in this recognition of Holocaust survivors fills us with pride and gives us hope that you will understand and continue to defend and protect us. And we in turn, will continue to be the best of Canadians as we have been since our arrival to this blessed land. And we will continue to teach through our life experiences, against prejudice and racism for we know and have felt the end results of hatred. It began with words and ended in gas chambers. And while we teach to secure the future of our grandchildren, we ask you to watch with us, for the signs we know all too well. For what happens to us, never remains with us alone. The hatred that is antisemitism inevitably spreads and devours others as surely as it destroyed millions of non-Jewish European citizens. Let us be watchful, proactive, and united. And let us not despair. As Elie Wiesel, the Nobel Peace Prize recipient and once an inmate of Auschwitz and Buchenwald has reminded us repeatedly, "Jews are forbidden to despair. We are commanded to dream and to hope". We will and so must we all, dream and hope.

Thank you.



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