

*Speech by H.E. Yacov Hadas-Handelsman
International Holocaust Remembrance Day
HDKE- Holocaust Memorial Center
January 27, 2022*

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

77 years after the end of World War II, anti-Semitism is unfortunately, on the rise again all around the world.

Especially after the horrors of the 20th century, it is unacceptable to tolerate this phenomenon in the 21st century.

On the 27th of January, we all pay tribute to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust and fully commit ourselves to counter antisemitism, racism, xenophobia, and any other form of intolerance and discrimination.

It is also important to note that January 20th marked the 80th anniversary of the notorious *Wannsee Conference* where Nazi officials planned the eradication of the Jewish people, also known as “The Final Solution.”

The UN General Assembly unanimously adopted on that day, a historic resolution calling for “action to combat Holocaust denial and distortion, as antisemitism continues to surge globally.”

We would like to thank Hungary for being one of the co-sponsors of this (draft) resolution.

It is necessary to understand that Anti-Semitism is also the introduction to other forms of hatred, discrimination, and exclusion of various groups of people who, for some reason, are considered different from others in society.

This sad reality urges us to make sure that the memories of the Shoah will never be forgotten, and that the voices of hate will be silenced.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For us, Jews, the Shoah is not just a story;
It is the story of our people,
It is the story of our community,
it is the story of our families,
It is the story of those aunts, uncles, and grandparents who we never had the chance to meet.
It is the story of those relatives who could have lived.
It is the story of those cousins we could have had.
It is the story of innocent people that could have lived full and happy lives and perhaps who could have even become inventors, teachers, lawyers, or engineers.
It is the story of lost lives. Lost souls. Lost beings.
It is the story of those we could have had, **(Pause)**
had the Shoah not taken place.

It is the story of the loss of Jewish people.

One third of Jewish lives were taken away.

77 years after, it simply does not matter how successful Jews have become all around the world, we are still around 3 million less than we were at the outbreak of the war in 1939, and this will apparently is an irreversible fact.

For Jews, it is not only Shoah, it is a personal loss and a grief so deep that will forever remain with us.

Therefore, it is our every right and duty to remind the generations to come, and educate them all about the Holocaust and most importantly, to never, ever forget.

It is essential to note that January 27th marks the anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau by Soviet troops.

Approximately 500,000 Jewish soldiers fought in the Red Army, and over one third of them lost their lives fighting against Nazi Germany and its allies.

Auschwitz was liberated by the 322nd Infantry Battalion under the command of Major Anatoliy Shapiro.

In an interview many years later, Shapiro described what he saw when he entered this hell on earth:

“The first thing I saw was a group of people standing outside in the snow, they looked like skeletons wearing prisoner uniforms and barefoot. They were so weak that they could not turn their heads towards us. We told them that the Red Army was here to liberate you. They started to touch us, to make sure we were reality and not ghosts.”

Today, the last survivors are passing away, and for many of our young people, the events of the Holocaust seem to belong to a far away and distant past, if, at all.

Auschwitz also has a Hungarian connection because as President János Áder said in his speech on the occasion of January 27th in 2014, that it is the biggest Hungarian cemetery on earth since around one third of the one and a half million people murdered there were Hungarian Jews.

Moreover, Hungary, unlike other countries, is not rejecting its past and bares its responsibly for it.

Remembering the Shoah is our shared global responsibility, and there is no better education for the future than to remember the past and to honor the victims of these devastating crimes.

Thus, we are here today to retell these stories, the stories of the destruction of our civilization.

It is your story, it is our story, it is both a Jewish story and a universal story.

The story of the survivors who are with us today,

the story of the six million who died, the story of the Jewish people and of anti-Semitism.

May the memory of our brothers and sisters be blessed forever.

Never Again!