

Nicky's Family - International Holocaust Memorial Day 2019

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Dear Guests,

This year the International Holocaust Memorial Day was marked as usual on the 27th of January - the day of the liberation of Auschwitz death camp, but this year it was a Sunday and therefore this meaningful commemoration was prolonged. Many of us assisted in the We Remember campaign, showing our responsibility, making sure that the memory will not fade out when the survivors will no longer be with us. This week, an amazing fact was presented via social media: "If we would have dedicated one minute of silence for each holocaust victim we would have to be silent for 11 years!"

To my mind, being silent is a way of paying respect but not a tool in preserving the memory of one of the most tragic events ever happened, one of the greatest calamities to humankind, the enormous loss of lives, of human potential in every field of life" medicine, law, politics, arts, science, economy and so much more. In Judaism there is a very important task to perform והגדת לבנך (and you should tell your son), speak, tell, make him or her know the story by heart, don't miss a thing because they will be the memory bearers when you are no longer there.

Unfortunately, we are getting closer and closer to the day in which no more firsthand witnesses of the holocaust will be with us to tell, more than 1000 holocaust survivors die every month.

At the same time, more and more people in our world are not exposed at all to the biggest disaster of humanity, to its reasons and to its history. A poll released to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day has found that 1 in 20 British adults does not believe the Holocaust happened and 12 percent think the scale of the genocide has been exaggerated. Nearly half of 2000 people who were questioned said they did not know how many Jews were murdered by the Nazis.

The head of the foundation that commissioned the survey said that he does not think that [the poll respondents] are active Holocaust deniers but their ignorance means they are susceptible to myths and distortions."

Many older surveys showed that the situation is more or less similar in many European countries and I tend to believe Bulgaria cannot be excluded. If one person questioning the truth of the Holocaust is one too many, and so it is up to us to redouble our efforts to ensure future generations know that it did happen and become witnesses.

However, talking about the holocaust -specially here in Bulgaria- and not mentioning the role of individuals in changing the course of life even of one person - would do injustice to almost 27,000 people all over the world who saved the life of hundreds of thousands of Jews. The Righteous Among the Nations, human angels who were willing to risk their lives for the sake of other human beings, those that on these days were marked as "others".

'The film we are about to see tells the story of Sir Nicolas Winton a man who saved thousands of Czech Jewish kids. If we see what they became later in their lives, when his story was still unknown , we understand that the old Talmudic proverb "The one who saves one soul is as if he saved a whole world" is relevant today.

Unfortunately, in recent years we have seen an unprecedented rise since the end of WWII of hate speech, xenophobia and intolerance as well as in anti-Semitic events. Once again dangerous winds are blowing, giving space to racism to populism, endangering the values and the achievements of the international community who learned a lesson after the war, who decided to invest in unity and cohesiveness. The words that we utter today "Never Again" are calling for a through soul- searching process, calling for education of the future generations, calling for all of us to pay attention to the story of Sir Nicolas Winton as well as to the story of Bulgaria. To remember that the power of each and every one of us to

do good is endless, it can change the direction of the wind and role the wheels of history back.

Since November 2018 Bulgaria is a full member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), it took upon itself the commitment for a long journey of study, research and education. It took upon itself the mission to accurately tell the complicated story of the Holocaust in the Balkans without overshadowing the marvelous story of the rescue of the Jews of Bulgaria. A very demanding task that requires a strong will and a courageous political and educational devotion.

Today, we dedicate ourselves to remember the goodness and kindness of humankind that was demonstrated in times when many did not believe they exist anymore. The journey towards remembrance is still long and full of obstacles - it is only through cooperation and mutual belief in the good that we can overcome, for the sake of the victims of the holocaust but none the less for the sake of our future generations.

Sofia, January 30 2019