

**Address by Prof. Ina Druviete,
the Latvian Minister of Education and Science,
at the opening of the new Remembrance Museum
at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, Remembrance Assembly
March 16, 2005**

Mr. President,
Excellences,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

It is difficult to describe the emotions that I feel here, at this place of remembrance, which was built to commemorate the mass murder of millions of human beings. The people who we are commemorating here today had their lives extinguished for one, and only one reason: they all happened to be Jewish.

The scope of the Shoah, or Holocaust, is so wide that it defies human comprehension. Among the millions who perished in the Shoah were tens of thousands of Latvian Jews – merchants, scientists, and teachers; men and woman, old people and children. The Shoah in Latvia was notorious not only for the near annihilation of Latvia's vibrant and thriving pre-war Jewish community. For reasons that defy human logic, the Nazi Germans also transported tens of thousands of

Jews from other parts of Europe to occupied Latvia. Nearly all of these people were massacred and buried in mass graves on Latvian soil. The Nazi Germans and their local accomplices conducted these appalling crimes against humanity at over 100 known sites in Latvia. During the four-year German occupation of my country, Latvia's soil was literally soaked in the blood of the innocent.

Since Latvia regained its independence in 1991, new monuments have been built and commemoration ceremonies have been held at a number of these Holocaust memorial sights, with the participation of Latvia's highest officials. Latvia acknowledges its victims, and also remembers its heroes – those who, by risking by their lives and those of their loved ones, found the courage to save their fellow human beings from imprisonment and death – their neighbours, their friends, their acquaintances, as well as complete strangers.

The horrors of the Nazi terror shocked and subdued a great many people in Latvia, but not all. To those courageous individuals who saved Jewish lives, we express our eternal gratitude. We can no longer thank these righteous men and women in person, but we can remember their names, so they fade not into obscurity. Their noble deeds serve as an

inspiration to us all, and as a reminder that human nature also has its good side.

Remembrance requires more than the erection of monuments in stone. It must extend to the depth of our hearts and our minds. We must ask ourselves how only a few decades ago, a supposedly civilized and advanced European society could permit itself to be consumed by an ideology of hatred; how it could permit the mass murder of innocent people, based on the sole criterion of their ethnic and religious origin.

Latvia has made a concerted and serious effort to conduct a frank and honest evaluation of its past history, and to ensure that the Holocaust is not forgotten. Since 1998, the Holocaust has been a required theme in *all* Latvian school history curricula for ninth and twelfth graders. Different aspects of the Holocaust are also studied in other school subjects. For example, literature classes include studies of such monumental works as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, as well as *The Sunflower* by Simon Wiesenthal and *Night* by Elie Wiesel.

Regular in-service training courses about the Holocaust are being organised for history teachers in all regions of Latvia. These teachers are also being informed about local Holocaust

memorial sites in their vicinity, and regularly organize student visits to these sites when teaching about the Holocaust.

The Association of Latvian History Teachers has been the main organizer of these courses, with the valuable assistance of the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science, the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Embassy of the United States of America in Latvia, The Living History Forum, the Swedish Institute and the International Task Force. Latvian teachers have attended a number of courses at the Yad Vashem centre in Israel, as well as at different institutions of Holocaust education in the U.S.A and Europe. Since the year 2000 about 50 to 60 Latvian history teachers have been attending such courses on the Holocaust every year.

Mr. President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Latvia realises its responsibility in the face of history. We are working hard to ensure that the youth of Latvia, and that Latvian society in general, is able to learn from the bitter lessons of Europe's bloody past. We are determined not to allow anti-Semitism and other forms of ethnic hatred to gain a foothold in our country, in Europe, or anywhere else in the world. I devoutly hope that we will be successful in our

vigilance, and that such moving memorials as this one here in Yad Vashem never need to be built again.