

Address of Mr. Toivo Maimets  
Minister of Education and Research  
at Yad Vashem  
on March 15, 2005

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

As a nation who has had a very difficult history Estonia finds it important to value the memory of people who have suffered through Holocaust and all other crimes against humanity. We must not forget what happened in Europe during WW II, the most tragic period of the last century. We neither can forget nor forgive the devastating work carried out against the Jews on the territory of Estonia and elsewhere in Europe.

Since Estonia regained its independence in 1991 we have come a long way towards shining light of truth of the European tragedies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For fifty years we were not allowed to do so and thus the reconciliation process within the society was delayed for half a century. Therefore also a lot still remains to be done. Until recently we had no well-documented and complete record that would have helped us understand what happened on Estonian territory.

That was also the reason why in 1998 former President Lennart Meri formed the Commission for Investigating the Crimes Committed against the Citizens of Estonia in 1940 and Crimes Committed on the Territory of Estonia. The intention was to enable Estonia to meet its future with encouragement, identifying each individual and every group, who carry responsibility for the tragedies committed during the last century.

Today, the report dealing with the first period of Soviet Occupation of Estonia 1940-1941 and the period of German occupation 1941-1944 have been finalized and will be published in the near future. This kind of academic material, approved by a commission of internationally well-known diplomats and historians will become the main source that is drawn from when educational materials for schools are **up-dated**. Today Holocaust is dealt with in depth in 5<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade history courses in Estonian schools and is included in schoolbooks. Holocaust is part of the National Curriculum as well.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Standing here at Yad Vashem today we all share the view that a person, who does not remember the past, lives without the future. It is up to us to decide what we do with our future, but it also depends very much upon how we understand our past.

That is also the reason why the Government of Estonia decided to dedicate 27<sup>th</sup> of January, as a Day of Remembrance of the victims of Holocaust and of victims of crimes against humanity. This Day of Remembrance serves to declare that we are committed to the prosecution of those individuals who committed war crimes; that we are committed to maintain and develop an educational system in which an understanding of the history of the Holocaust is an integral part of young people's view of the world; and that we are committed to build a tolerant, pluralistic society where the rights of all religious and ethnic minorities are fully protected.

The Ministry of Education provides materials and gives suggestions to schools regarding what activities could be undertaken on that day. In January 2005 we provided schools with a copy of the film called "Outcast" in cooperation with Yad Vashem. Teachers are being specially trained to teach about Holocaust and tolerance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In addition to the above-mentioned activities the Estonian government believes that education needs to go hand in hand with other more public and high-attention activities, such as conferences and symposiums like the recent OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism in Berlin this year and the Conference on Tolerance and the Fight Against Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination in Brussels.

But also events such as marking and maintaining the places of historic value and significance in Estonia is important – like the 5 memorial stones that will be opened during 2005.

Let me finish by once again stressing that just as there is no reasonable explanation to Holocaust, there is no human alternative to keeping the memory of the perished. Juhan Parts, the Prime Minister of Estonia wrote the following words in the book at Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial: "Remembering the lives not lived, thinking about the future".

Thank you.