

Address by PM Benjamin Netanyahu on Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day

Before the recent Pesach holiday, a Jewish hero passed away – David Plonsky, also known as "Yurek", may his memory be blessed – the cigarette salesman from the Triple Cross Square in Warsaw.

Yurek was only 14 when the Warsaw Ghetto was established. He turned from child into adult overnight. He smuggled food into the ghetto and his life was under constant threat. Yurek survived. He immigrated to Israel, fought in the War of Independence, started a family and built a home at Kibbutz Meggido. He lost his son Eitan during the Yom Kippur War, but found the fortitude to overcome this tragedy as well. He continued living, continued building and continued inculcating his legacy into thousands of youngsters.

His life story and activities are, to a large extent, a mirror of the Jewish people's transition from exile to liberty – a story of suffering, supreme heroism, construction and renaissance; a story of bereavement, faith and independence.

Yurek may have survived the inferno, but close to a million and a half Jewish children did not survive and perished in the Holocaust. I think the human mind cannot grasp this fact. We always see before us the famous picture of the frightened Jewish child, raising his hands in front of the barrels of German rifles. But this child was only one out of a million and a half children, a million and a half pairs of frightened eyes. Each one of them was an entire world of hopes and dreams, a mother's love and a father's concern, a world transformed instantly into one of terror, suffering and death.

Some of them survived for months and years, hiding in dungeons and forests, freezing in the snow, or starving to death. Children of ten or twelve years-old, escaping like persecuted wild animals from the Nazi hunters hunting them down in order to kill them. Some of these children found shelter in churches and convents, separated from their parents, torn by their longings, sometimes

found shelter in the homes of the best of humanity, non-Jews, Righteous Gentiles who risked not only their lives, but also the lives of their families to rescue them from death.

Some of the children, like Yurek, in a reversal of roles became children defending their parents. Children of eight or nine years-old who risked their lives daily to bring food into the starved ghetto and a piece of bread for mommy and daddy. Little heroes, awarded a medal by no one. The majority of them left behind them neither a name nor a trace. The Nazi beast devoured them and their parents, and there is no one to tell of their tale of heroism.

However, even in moments of the most terrible despair of our people's history, in the final moments of the Warsaw Ghetto, Jewish youngsters from all streams fought an unparalleled war of heroism against the Nazi oppressor. By doing so, they marked the great transformation that was about to occur in the fate of our people several years later, with the establishment of the State of Israel and the Israel Defense Forces.

Distinguished Guests,

"In every generation they rise against us to destroy us; and the Holy One, blessed be He, saves us from their hand". He saves us through the living spirit in our people and its representatives – judges, prophets, kings, Maccabim.

However, in the case of the Holocaust, the rescue came late, too late for six million of our people, and a new flame was rekindled in our remaining survivors only with the establishment of the State of Israel in the Land of Israel.

Anti-Semitism is an age-old historic phenomenon. However, if anyone thought that after the horrors of the Holocaust, this malignant phenomenon will vanish from the world, today it is clear that they were, unfortunately, mistaken. Concurrently with human progress and enlightenment, the dark

shadows of hatred are again invading our people and State.

In our generation, only a few dozen years after the Holocaust, new forces arise, clearly and openly stating their intention to wipe the Jewish State off the face of the earth. And the response of the civilized world? Instead of a firm denunciation – at best, we hear a faint voice.

The unfortunate fact is that while we are marking the events of the Holocaust here at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, there are those who chose to participate in a spectacle of hatred of Israel, conducted at this very hour in the heart of Europe.

From here I turn to you, President of Switzerland, and I ask you: how can you, as a head of an enlightened state, meet with those who deny the Holocaust and strive for another one?

In opposition to this, we express our appreciation to those important countries which chose to boycott this demonstration of hatred – including the United States, Canada, Germany, Italy, Holland, Poland, Australia and New Zealand, as well as representatives who left the hall during the hateful words of the Iranian president.

We must awaken the nations' conscience, we must form alliances and make connections, but above all, we must remember that our ability to repel the threats to our people's existence stems from the strength of our State, from our unity and our cohesion in times of trial.

We will not allow Holocaust deniers to carry out another Jewish Holocaust. This is the supreme commitment of the State of Israel, and it is my supreme commitment as Prime Minister of Israel.

The State of Israel is the shield; it is the comfort and hope of the Jewish people. It is where we gather our exiles, where we build new cities in the land of our forefathers, where we create, for the glory of our people and for all

mankind.

Israel's achievements in all fields – culture, technology, science, agriculture, medicine and security are groundbreaking. Our people may be small in number, but of great strength.

Distinguished Guests,

Six years ago, Yurek, may his memory be blessed, was one of the torch lighters here at Yad Vashem. This evening, six Holocaust survivors will light memorial torches. Each one of them has a touching human story and a contribution to the building of the people and the state.

The Government of Israel has a deep commitment to you, Holocaust survivors. In past years the state did not always meet your special needs. Over the past several years things have changed. Today, I guarantee you that we will continue to properly address your needs. You are clear evidence of the transcendence of the Jewish spirit, this spirit which held the power to rise up from the valley of death, return to our homeland and build our lives here.

In the words of Prophet Zachariah: "Thus said Hashem, Master of Legions: My cities will once again spread out with bounty; Hashem will have mercy on Zion once again and He will choose Jerusalem once again".