

May 13, 1999

REMARKS OF BENJAMIN MEED ON
THE HOLOCAUST

HON. CAROLYN B. MALONEY

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 13, 1999

Mrs. MALONEY of New York. Mr. Speaker, I would like to share with my colleagues the remarks of Mr. Benjamin Meed who recently gave an exceptionally moving speech about Yom Hashoah, The Days of Remembrance, at the United States Capitol. Mr. Meed is Chairman of both The Days of Remembrance Committee, United States Holocaust Memorial Council and the Warsaw Ghetto Resistance Organization (WAGRO). He is also the President of The American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors. Mr. Meed is a champion of humanitarian causes around the world.

REMARKS BY BENJAMIN MEED, CHAIRMAN,
DAYS OF REMEMBRANCE COMMITTEE, UNITED
STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL COUNCIL

REFUGEE DENIED: THE VOYAGE OF THE SS ST.
LOUIS

Members of the diplomatic corps, distinguished members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives, members of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, distinguished guests, fellow survivors and dear friends.

Welcome to our 20th national Days of Remembrance commemoration.

For at least a decade, the magnificent flags that surround us now have been part of our annual observance here in the nation's Capitol. Every time the American flag, and the flags of the United States Army Divisions that liberated the concentration camps, are brought into this Hall for this commemoration, a special pride as an American citizen sweeps over me, as I am sure it must for all Holocaust survivors. These pieces of red, white and blue cloth were the symbols of freedom and hope for those of us caught in the machinery of death. Discovery of the German Nazi concentration camps by the Allied armies began the process that restored our lives. Although we have many dates this month to remember, we recall with special gratitude the date of April 11, 1945, when American troops, in their march to end the war in Europe, came across the Buchenwald concentration camp. We will always remain grateful to the American soldiers for their bravery, kindness and generosity. We will always remember those young soldiers who sacrificed their lives to bring us liberty.

Many revelations over the last half a century have unveiled the Holocaust as a story of massive destruction and loss. It has been shown to be the story of an apathetic world—world full of callous dispassion and moral insensitivity, with few individual exceptions. But more, it has been shown to be a tale of victory—victory of the human spirit, of extraordinary courage and of remarkable endurance. It is the story of life that flourished before the Shoah, that struggled throughout its darkest hours, and that ultimately prevailed.

And after the Holocaust, as we rebuilt our lives, we also built a nation—the State of Israel. This was our answer to death and destruction—new life, both family and national life—and Remembrance. Minister Ben-David, please convey to the people of Israel our solidarity with them as they, too, Remember today on this Yom Hashoah.

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

Today, our thoughts turn back sixty years. On May 13, 1939, the SS St. Louis sailed from Hamburg bound for Havana with more than nine hundred passengers, most of them Jews fleeing Nazism. For these passengers, it was a desperate bid for freedom that was doomed before it began. Politics, profit and public opinion were permitted to overshadow morality, compassion and common sense. It is so painful now to realize that not only Cuba but our own beloved country closed her doors and her heart to these People of the Book who could see the lights of Miami from the decks of the ship but were not allowed to disembark. This group of nine hundred could have been saved, but instead the voyage became a round-trip passage to hell for many of them. Less than three months after the St. Louis docked at Antwerp, the world was at war. And in less than three years, the "Final Solution of the Jewish Problem" in Europe was fully operational.

Could this happen today? Hopefully, not. But we—all of us—must be vigilant—ever mindful that once such a course of destruction of a people has been chartered, it can be followed again, and again, and again.

And what lessons did we derive from these horrible experiences? The most important lesson is obvious—it can happen again, the impossible is possible again. Ethnic cleansing, genocide, is happening as I speak. It can happen to any one or any group of people. The slaughter in Kosovo and in other places must be brought to an end.

Should there be another Holocaust, it may be on a cosmic scale. How can we prevent it? All of us must remain vigilant—always aware, always on guard against those who are determined to destroy innocent human life for no other reason than birthright.

There are some passengers of that unfortunate voyage of the SS St. Louis who are with us here today. Like most of us Holocaust survivors, they are in the winter of their lives. Even so, all of us look toward the future, because we believe that, in sharing our experiences—by bearing witness—there is hope of protecting other generations who might be abandoned and forgotten, robbed and murdered. The telling and retelling of the stories of the Holocaust with their profound lessons for humanity must become a mission for all humankind. In this way, future generations, particularly future generations of Americans, can Remember and can use the power of this knowledge to protect people everywhere.

In these great halls of Congress, we see symbols of the ideals that this country represents. It was the collective rejection of these ideals by many nations that made the Holocaust possible. Today, let us all promise to keep an ever-watchful eye for those who would deny the principles of liberty, equality and justice, and for those who would defy the rules of honorable and peaceful conduct between peoples, and nations. Together, let us remember. Thank you.

RECOGNIZING CATHERINE
RODRIGUEZ

HON. SCOTT McINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 13, 1999

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to recognize the career of one

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of Colorado's leading ladies, and recipient of the Distinguished Service Award, Catherine Rodriguez. In doing so, I would like to honor this individual who, for many years, has exhibited dedication and experience to the court system of San Luis Valley.

As a District court reporter for the last 15 years, Ms. Rodriguez has been an active participant and leader for the Colorado's court reporters. Before becoming it's president in 1996-97, Catherine Rodriguez served on the Colorado Court Reporter's Association board for 7 years. She has proven to be valuable in creating a page-rate increase, as well as voicing Colorado's need for computer-integrated courtrooms.

Catherine Rodriguez has more than proven herself as a valuable asset to the court system of San Luis Valley, therefore, earning Colorado's highest honor for court reporters. This is a great achievement considering that she is only the second recipient in recent years.

It is with this, Mr. Speaker, that I say thank you to Catherine Rodriguez on a truly exceptional career as a Colorado court reporter. Due to Ms. Rodriguez's dedicated service, it is clear that Colorado is a better place.

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF TEMPLE
BETH TORAH

HON. ROBERT A. BORSKI

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 13, 1999

Mr. BORSKI. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the Temple Beth Torah. This synagogue serves the Jewish community in Northeast Philadelphia as well as the surrounding suburban neighborhoods of Montgomery and Bucks Counties.

Boulevard Temple was the original name of the synagogue when it was formed in 1949. In 1965, it was necessary to change the location of the temple in order to better serve the Jewish community. Since this expansion, the synagogue has been known as the Temple Beth Torah.

Temple Beth Torah enriches the community in many ways. Beyond meaningful and significant services, the synagogue has formed and manages a highly regarded School of Religion and an excellent Nursery School. In addition, the members of Temple Beth Torah improve their community through a wide array of events and activities. The Sisterhood, Men's Club and PTA strive to develop programs that will engage and educate congregants of all ages.

I wish to sincerely honor the Temple Beth Torah for its many accomplishments and offer my congratulations on the 50th anniversary. I hope the Temple continues to help the Jewish community prosper, flourish and benefit for many more years into the future.