

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2017

Remarks at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Days of Remembrance Ceremony

April 25, 2017

Thank you very much. Thank you. Friends, Members of Congress, Ambassadors, veterans, and most especially, to the survivors here with us today: It's an honor to join you on this very, very solemn occasion. I am deeply moved to stand before those who survived history's darkest hour. Your cherished presence transforms this place into a sacred gathering.

Thank you, Tom Bernstein, Allan Holt, Sara Bloomfield, and everyone at the Holocaust Memorial Council and Museum for your vital work and tireless contributions.

We are privileged to be joined by Israel's Ambassador to the United States, friend of mine—he's done a great job and said some wonderful words—Ron Dermer. The State of Israel is an eternal monument to the undying strength of the Jewish people. The fervent dream that burned in the hearts of the oppressed is now filled with the breath of life, and the Star of David waves atop a great nation arisen from the desert.

To those in the audience who have served America in uniform, our country eternally thanks you. We are proud and grateful to be joined today by veterans of the Second World War who liberated survivors from the camps. Your sacrifice helped save freedom for the world, for the entire world.

Sadly, this year marks the first Day of Remembrance since the passing of Elie Wiesel, a great person, a great man. His absence leaves an empty space in our hearts, but his spirit fills this room. It is the kind of gentle spirit of an angel who lived through hell and whose courage still lights the path from darkness. Though Elie's story is well known by so many people, it's always worth repeating. He suffered the unthinkable horrors of the Holocaust. His mother and sister perished in Auschwitz. He watched his father slowly dying before his own young eyes in Buchenwald. He lived through an endless nightmare of murder and death, and he inscribed on our collective conscience the duty we have to remember that long, dark night so as never to again repeat it.

The survivors in this hall, through their testimony, fulfill the righteous duty to never forget and engrave into the world's memory the Nazi genocide of the Jewish people. You witnessed evil and what you saw is beyond description, beyond any description. Many of you lost your entire family, everything and everyone you loved, gone. You saw mothers and children led to mass slaughter. You saw the starvation and the torture. You saw the organized attempt at the extermination of an entire people—and great people, I must add. You survived the ghettos, the concentration camps and the death camps. And you persevered to tell your stories. You tell of these living nightmares because, despite your great pain, you believe in Elie's famous plea, that "For the dead and the living, we must bear witness."

That is why we are here today: to remember and to bear witness. To make sure that humanity never, ever forgets. The Nazis massacred 6 million Jews. Two out of every three Jews in Europe were murdered in the genocide. Millions more innocent people were imprisoned and executed by the Nazis without mercy, without even a sign of mercy.

Yet, even today, there are those who want to forget the past. Worse still, there are even those filled with such hate—total hate—that they want to erase the Holocaust from history. Those who deny the Holocaust are an accomplice to this horrible evil. And we'll never be silent—we just won't—we will never, ever be silent in the face of evil again.

Denying the Holocaust is only one of many forms of dangerous anti-Semitism that continues all around the world. We've seen anti-Semitism on university campuses, in the public square, and in threats against Jewish citizens. Even worse, it's been on display in the most sinister manner when terrorists attack Jewish communities or when aggressors threaten Israel with total and complete destruction.

This is my pledge to you: We will confront anti-Semitism. *[Applause]* Thank you. We will stamp out prejudice. We will condemn hatred. We will bear witness. And we will act. As President of the United States, I will always stand with the Jewish people, and I will always stand with our great friend and partner, the State of Israel.

So today we remember the 6 million Jewish men, women, and children whose lives and dreams were stolen from this Earth. We remember the millions of other innocent victims the Nazis so brutally targeted and so brutally killed. We remember the survivors who bore more than we can imagine. We remember the hatred and evil that sought to extinguish human life, dignity, and freedom.

But we also remember the light that shone through the darkness. We remember sisters and brothers who gave everything to those they loved—survivors like Steven Springfield, who, in the long death march, carried his brother on his back. As he said, "I just couldn't give in."

We remember the brave souls who banded together to save the lives of their neighbors, even at the risk of their own life. And we remember those first hopeful moments of liberation, when at long last the American soldiers arrived in camps and cities throughout occupied Europe, waving the same beautiful flags before us today, speaking those three glorious words: "You are free."

It is this love of freedom, this embrace of human dignity, this call to courage in the face of evil that the survivors here today have helped to write onto our hearts. The Jewish people have endured oppression, persecution, and those who have sought and planned their destruction. Yet, through the suffering, they have persevered. They have thrived. And they have enlightened the world. We stand in awe of the unbreakable spirit of the Jewish people.

I want to close with a story enshrined in the museum that captures the moment of liberation in the final days of the war. It is the story of Gerda Klein, a young Jewish woman from Poland. Some of you know her. Gerda's family was murdered by the Nazis. She spent 3 years imprisoned in labor camps and the last 4 months of the war on a terrible death march. She assumed it was over. At the end, on the eve of her 21st birthday, her hair had lost all of its color, and she weighed a mere 68 pounds. Yet she had the will to live another day. It was tough.

Gerda later recalled the moment she realized that her long-awaited deliverance had arrived. She saw a car coming towards her. Many cars had driven up before, but this one was different. On its hood, in place of that wretched swastika, was a bright, beautiful, gleaming white star. Two American soldiers got out. One walked up to her. The first thing Gerda said was what she had been trained to say: "We are Jewish, you know." "We are Jewish." And then, he said, "So am I." It was a beautiful moment after so much darkness, after so much evil.

As Gerda took this soldier to see other prisoners, the American did something she had long forgotten to even expect: He opened the door for her. In Gerda's words, "that was the moment of restoration of humanity, of humanness, of dignity, and of freedom."

But the story does not end there. Because, as some of you know, that young American soldier who liberated her and who showed her such decency would soon become her husband. A year later, they were married. In her words, "He opened not only the door for me, but the door to my life and to my future."

Gerda has since spent her life telling the world of what she witnessed. She, like those survivors who are among us today, has dedicated her life to shining a light of hope through the dark of night.

Your courage strengthens us. Your voices inspire us. And your stories remind us that we must never, ever shrink away from telling the truth about evil in our time. Evil is always seeking to wage war against the innocent and to destroy all that is good and beautiful about our common humanity. But evil can only thrive in darkness. And what you have brought us today is so much more powerful than evil. You have brought us hope, hope that love will conquer hatred, that right will defeat wrong, and that peace will rise from the ashes of war.

Each survivor here today is a beacon of light, and it only takes one light to illuminate even the darkest space. Just like it takes only one truth to crush a thousand lies and one hero to change the course of history. We know that in the end, good will triumph over evil and that as long as we refuse to close our eyes or to silence our voices, we know that justice will ultimately prevail.

So today we mourn. We remember. We pray. And we pledge: Never again.

Thank you. God bless you, and God bless America. Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:30 a.m. in the Rotunda at the U.S. Capitol. In his remarks, he referred to New York City resident Steven Springfield and his brother Peter; and Scottsdale, AZ, resident Gerda Weissmann Klein.

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