

## HOLOCAUST LESSONS FOR TODAY

Hon. David Kilgour, JD

Jean Piggott Hall

Ottawa City Hall

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Four years ago, my wife Laura and I visited Auschwitz-Birkenau, which were preserved by the Polish Parliament as monuments to the Holocaust/Shoah. We walked mostly in silence for about three hours. It was the most inhuman place she and I have ever seen.

If more of the world's Holocaust deniers would visit, some of them might mute at least this expression of their antisemitism.

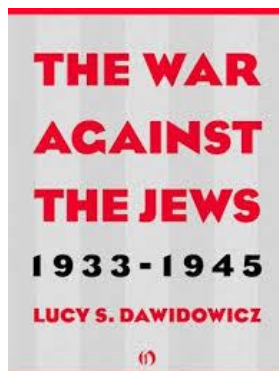
Here are two points recalled vividly from our visit:



Lighting candles in memory of victims of Holocaust/Shoah at Ottawa City Hall, February 3, 2014: (left to right) Hon. Irwin Cotler, survivor Vera Gara, survivor Cantor Moshe Kraus, David Kilgour, Adam Moscoe, and Michael McIntyre (rep from Ottawa Interfaith Council)

- The photographer entering the camps with Russian soldiers on Jan. 27, 1945, who freed approximately 7000 surviving inmates, including 400 children-many of them barely alive from starvation-said the "perfectly organized" facilities were "the most shocking thing I saw and filmed (during) the war".
- Arriving in train cattle cars at Birkenau after 1942, Jewish victims were separated by medical doctors on the basis of whether or not they appeared able to work as slaves in factories. Those deemed 'unfit' were murdered immediately. Approximately one million children and adults were killed by cyanide gas. The two death camps became the best-known symbols of the Holocaust, but there were others, where another five million individuals perished.

### Lucy Dawidowicz



The late Lucy Dawidowicz's book, *The War Against The Jews, 1933-1945*, notes: "...hatred of the Jews was Hitler's central and most compelling belief ...it dominated his thoughts and his actions all his life..."

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler provided much about his personal world view. He was a confirmed antisemite when he was fifteen,

partly it appears because of the influence of teachers at his schools. For him, Jewishness became a race only. His views were virtually indistinguishable from the antisemitism of the Middle Ages and, when combined with his sado-masochism, the result was the most inhuman act in all of human history.

The world must keep in mind what Hitler had done by the time of his suicide in 1945. According to Dawidowicz, the best estimated number of European Jews Hitler and his followers murdered in Europe was 5,933,900, or 67% of the continent's pre-Holocaust population, including three million Poles, or 90% of the Jewish population of Poland, 90% of the Jewish population of Germany, the Baltics and Austria, and high percentages in many other countries.

Nationals in some countries strongly resisted Nazi efforts to get them to deport Jews to concentration camps. In occupied Denmark, for example, the king and a large number of Danes wore yellow stars to show support for their Jewish neighbours. Danes risked their lives, smuggling a large number of Jewish Danes to neutral Sweden. Finland and Bulgaria simply refused Nazi demands to hand over their Jewish citizens.

Further away, a few other nations helped. The government of El Salvador, for example, issued more than 30,000 of its passports to Jewish Hungarians so that they could avoid the death camps. Raoul Wallenberg of Sweden disappeared in the Soviet gulag for doing the same thing.

Le Maroc a également refusé de rendre les Juifs à Hitler. Le Roi Mohammad V a répondu à Hitler: "Ici, nous n'avons pas de Juifs, seulement des Marocains!" En réponse, les nazis ont bombardé Casablanca.

### **Gertruda Rosenberg, Moshe Kraus and Vera Gara**



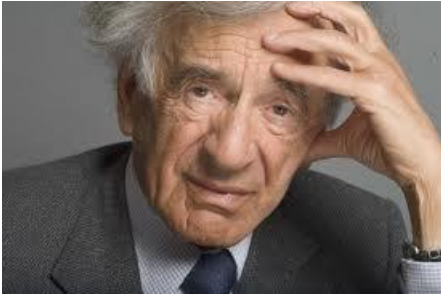
**Dr. Truda Rosenberg**

Three survivors are Vera Gara, Cantor Moshe Kraus, and Truda Rosenberg, two of whom are here today. Mrs. Gara will speak. Cantor Kraus survived because a camp commander liked his singing. Dr. Rosenberg's entire family perished in the Holocaust, but at the age of twenty, she was small enough that others could push her out a window in the wall of the train cattle car that was taking her and many others to a death camp. I encourage you to read her book, *Unmasked*, which was published by Carleton U. in English and by the U. of Ottawa en français.

We must never forget any of the Shoah victims. We must tell and retell their stories – we must never forget. Nous devons toujours souvenir!

### **Antisemitism**

Hitler's assault on Jews was the culmination of generations of European antisemitism. Only one well-known Christian leader in Germany, Provost Bernard Lichtenberg, openly stood up for Jews in his Berlin church and he paid for his courage with his life.



Elie Wiesel

Elie Wiesel, the Nobel Laureate for peace, noted:

*"Everybody knew except the victims. Nobody cared enough to tell us: Don't go. If Roosevelt had gone on the radio and simply said: Jews of Hungary, don't go because Auschwitz is there...If Churchill had done the same...We listened to the BBC, we listened to the radio. I don't understand it. They were good people."*



Provost Bernard Lichtenberg

Too many in my own faith community (Christianity) stood by as the worst catastrophe in human history was inflicted on sisters and brothers of Jewish faith. There were individual exceptions in all countries conquered by Hitler, but many Christians in Canada and Europe did virtually nothing to honour the second great commandment of Jesus ("Love your neighbour as I have loved you."). Canada's official role-or more accurately non-role- before entering WW2 is well set out in *None Is Too Many* by Irving Abella and Harold Troper.

Did the immunity provided for Nazi war criminals when the work of the Nuremberg Tribunal was stopped in 1948 somehow help to provide a licence for subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Sudan and what has been happening to the Falun Gong community across China since mid-1999 (see, for example, [www.david-kilgour.com](http://www.david-kilgour.com))? 'Never again' became 'again and again'.

### Lessons for Today

Permit me to suggest three lessons of the Holocaust for today:

- (1)** We need to stand united against hatred and indifference. The 20th century was the worst in history in terms of violence directed at believers of all faiths, mostly by totalitarian regimes. The major lesson for all faith communities is clear: if we stand shoulder-to-shoulder when anyone in our own or another religion is being persecuted anywhere, many innocent lives can be saved.
- (2)** We need to act early. The desecration of Jewish synagogues and cemeteries has increased in recent years across the world; faith communities and inter-faith councils should voice outrage the moment they occur. We should all speak out for a world that is multi-religious and multi-cultural. Civil society, community leaders, role models and governments at all levels must denounce antisemitism and hatred voiced against any religion or culture.
- (3)** The international community must condemn and deter aggression by regimes against another country or religion. As Rabbi Reuven Bulka says, "Holocaust deniers are not stupid; they are evil. The deniers would eagerly welcome another holocaust, which they and their ideological progeny would again deny ever happened."

### Combating Antisemitism

Canada's Prime Minister Harper in the Knesset last month spoke in part about a new antisemitism in the world. As he put it, the world has observed in recent years, the "mutation of the old disease of antisemitism and the emergence of a new strain... in much of the western world, the old hatred has been translated into more sophisticated language for use in polite society".

*Globalizing Hatred - The New Antisemitism* by Denis MacShane, minister for Europe in Tony Blair's cabinet, is blunt. In 2005-06, MacShane chaired the first-ever UK All-Party Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into antisemitism. Let me stress only two of the points his book makes:

- As he tells his 10,000 Muslim constituents, whom he describes as people of peace, proud of family, faith and their attachment to Kashmir, Yemen and other places they or their forefathers came from, Islam the faith is not the issue. "It is Islamism the ideology that must be discussed openly and when it supports antisemitism or the denial of democracy and human rights it must be opposed."
- Debating Israel and its policies is perfectly legitimate always, notes MacShane, but "what is not legitimate is to turn criticism of Israel into a condemnation of Jews and to paint them today, as in the past, in negative stereotypes that deny their faith, their birth, their right not to be frightened and their right to support their affiliations and causes."



Daniel Goldhagen

As you know, increased interfaith harmony is essential for a more peaceful 21<sup>st</sup> century, so I'd like to close by drawing on a book published last year, *The Devil That Never Dies*, the rise and threat of global antisemitism, by Daniel Goldhagen, formerly of Harvard's academic staff.

His thesis is that antisemitism has exploded in recent decades, insinuating itself into the minds of hundreds of millions of persons around the world.

The book is comprehensive, but permit me to stress three of its points:

- The resurgence of antisemitism has occurred around the world, especially and unexpectedly in Western countries "...among elites and common people... public media, places of worship, and in the privacy of homes."
- In religious communities, Christians were for centuries told that Jews, rather than Romans, killed God's son; the New Testament before modernization was replete with inaccurate references to the faith community into which Jesus was born and died (Fortunately, most Christians now repudiate these notions as the book notes). Muslims are told that Jews sought to kill God's prophet, Muhammad, and are the enemies of Allah. In the absence of reform of the Qur'an and the Hadith, some Muslims still advocate violence against Jews.
- Myriad other falsehoods have been repeated by antisemites ad nauseam for centuries. In recent years, the preposterous list includes, "Jews invented AIDS, Jews are responsible for 9/11. Jews control the United States. Jews caused the Iraq War...Jews are a vanguard of the West to enslave Muslims and destroy Islam." Many antisemitic books have been published. The Internet affords such toxic writing virtually unlimited opportunities for posting, chatting, tweeting and other social networking, the author notes.

### Conclusion

The ongoing campaign against antisemitism by all responsible people, faith communities and governments must be realistic in its continuous efforts. Hard-core hate mongers might persist, but many others can be reached, especially young people. Universal values, such as fair-mindedness, justice for all, and compassion, are strong allies in combating racism, including antisemitism.

Thank you