

Proposed Raoul Wallenberg Award for Combating Antisemitism and Intolerance of Faith Communities

Notes for remarks by David Kilgour at a fund-raising event

Ottawa

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Dear admirers of Raoul Wallenberg,

Thanks to George and Vera Gara, Daniel Springer and those who persuaded you all to come tonight.

One of the points David Matas makes in his recently-published autobiography, *Why Did you Do that?*, is that the Swedish businessman and diplomat Raoul Wallenberg during only six months saved the lives of about 50,000 Hungarian Jews from certain death by using “protective Swedish passports and every means he could.”

Matas has worked with others, including members of Raoul Wallenberg's immediate family, for many years to learn what happened to Canada's first honorary citizen after he was arrested by Soviet soldiers on Jan. 17, 1945. He believes there is a moral duty upon Russia and the “whole global community” to establish the truth about what happened to Wallenberg. "Wallenberg showed us that all that is necessary for evil to be defeated is for the good to be active," says Matas.

This is of course why Wallenberg's name and the values he personifies are to be central to the intended Award for Moral Courage in the Face of Antisemitism or other forms of religious intolerance. Nominations from the public for the first award are requested by July 17, with the criteria to be individual(s) or organization(s),

- 1) who have stood fast, in words and/or deeds, for multi-religious inclusion and appreciation in the face of antisemitism,
- 2) who, in working for the sake of others, have shared the values of Raoul Wallenberg by protecting the vulnerable from religious persecution and irrational fear mongering, such as antisemitism,

3) who have taken personal risks to defend the religious rights of others, even those outside their own faith.

(Anyone wishing to make a nomination can send it and details c/o dwkilgour@gmail.com. By July 14)

Confronting Antisemitism

Many in my own faith community (Christianity) stood by during the worst catastrophe in history inflicted on sisters and brothers of Jewish faith. There were exceptions, but most Christians in Canada, Europe and elsewhere did little to honour the second great commandment -- to love one's neighbour as oneself. 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.

A book published in 2013, *The Devil That Never Dies, The Rise and Threat of Global Antisemitism*, by Daniel Goldhagen, should be mentioned here. Its thesis is that antisemitism has exploded in recent decades, insinuating itself into the minds of millions of persons globally. Permit me to provide four of its key points:

- The global resurgence of antisemitism has occurred in Western countries “...among elites and common people... public media, places of worship, and in the privacy of homes.”
- Christians were wrongly told for centuries that Jews, rather than the Romans, killed God’s son; the New Testament before its modernization was replete with inaccurate references to the faith community into which Jesus was born and died (Fortunately, most Christians now repudiate such notions. I believe antisemitism is now a sin for Catholics and should be too in all faiths).
- Muslims are erroneously told that Jews sought to kill God’s prophet, Muhammad, and are the enemies of Allah. In the absence of reformed interpretation of the Qur’an and the Hadith, some Muslims still advocate violence against Jews.
- Myriad other absurd falsehoods have been repeated by antisemites over centuries. Goldhagen adds that the Internet affords such toxic writing unlimited opportunities for posting, chatting, tweeting and other social

networking. The campaign against antisemitism by all responsible people, faith communities and governments must be determined and realistic.

Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot

The 20th century was the worst ever in terms of violence directed at believers of all faiths, mostly by totalitarians like Hitler, Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot. 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, innocent lives can be saved. Early intervention and solidarity are essential. An attack on one faith community in a nation usually becomes an attack on all before long.

The desecration of Jewish synagogues and cemeteries has increased across the world; faith communities and inter-faith councils should voice outrage the moment incidents occur. We should all speak out for a multi-religious and multi-cultural world. Civil society, community leaders, role models and governments at all levels must denounce antisemitism and hatred voiced against any religion or culture anywhere.

Muslim communities, too, find themselves under siege, in Myanmar for instance, with China and India doing next to nothing to assist refugees belonging to Myanmar's Muslim minority. In Iraq, Sunni radicals harass Shiites, Shiites go after Sunnis; in India, Hindus after Muslims and vice versa. Moderate voices calling for tolerance and reconciliation are too often stifled in many lands.

The international community must condemn and deter aggression by regimes against minority faith communities. As Rabbi Reuven Bulka of Ottawa says, "Holocaust deniers are not stupid; they are evil. (They) would eagerly welcome another holocaust, which they and their ideological progeny would again deny ever happened."

Some famous words of Jesus link explicitly love of God and love of neighbor, "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13, 34-35). The two great commandments, found in both the New Testament and the Hebrew Torah, are one. Love of God is love of neighbour; love of neighbour is love of God.

Vera Gara, Alex Polowin and Ethan Gutmann

The next speakers are:

Vera Gara is the author of *Least Expected Heroes of the Holocaust* (2011), a memoir about ordinary people who showed humanity in terrible times. She had her childhood interrupted by the rise of the Nazis and World War II. She pays tribute to the people who put themselves at risk to try to help her and her parents, first in 1938 when Hitler annexed Austria, and then in 1944-5, when the Jews of Hungary were rounded up by the Nazis.

Gara, who devotes herself to volunteer work and public education about the Holocaust, was instrumental in the establishment of Raoul Wallenberg Park in Ottawa (Nepean) and, as a result, was awarded membership in the Order of the Polar Star, the highest honour that the Swedish government bestows on foreigners.

Alex Polowin, 90, a WW2 hero, is the second Canadian to receive the Legion D'honneur from the French government, and was chosen with others to represent Canadian veterans at the D-Day ceremony last year and earlier this year in Holland, at the 70th commemoration of its liberation. He volunteered for the Canadian Navy at the age of 17 in Ottawa. The three ships he served on took part in the sinking or disabling of 56 enemy ships.

Ethan Gutmann is an award-winning China analyst and human-rights investigator. He has provided testimony and briefings to the United States Congress, the Central Intelligence Agency, the European Parliament, the United Nations, and parliaments across the world. A former foreign-policy analyst at the Brookings Institution, he's the author of *Losing the New China* and last year, *The Slaughter*, a book that details organ harvesting from Falun Gong, Uyghurs, and Tibetans in China in chilling detail.

In *The Slaughter*, he closes with these words:

As a survival mechanism of our species, we must contextualize, evaluate, and ultimately learn from every human descent into mass murder.... The critical thing is that there is a history. And only the victims' families can absolve the party from its weight.

Thank you. Vera...please.