

## **Raoul Wallenberg Award for Combating Antisemitism and Intolerance of Faith Communities**

Notes for remarks by David Kilgour at ceremony in Parliament of Canada

Ottawa, 21 March 2016



Rev. Majed El Shafie of Toronto accepting Raoul Wallenberg Award for Moral Courage.

David Matas of Canada notes in his autobiography, *Why Did you Do that?*, 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 members of Raoul Wallenberg's immediate family and others for many years to learn what happened to Canada's first honorary citizen after he was arrested by Soviet soldiers on Jan. 17, 1945. Matas 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.

Wallenberg's name and the values he personifies are central to tonight's Award for Moral Courage in the Face of Antisemitism or other forms of religious intolerance. The criteria are individual(s) or organization(s), 1) who have stood fast in words 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.

The first honouree, Rev. Majed El Shafie has courageously opposed both anti-Semitism and the persecution of all other spiritual and cultural minorities.

## **Confronting Antisemitism**

Far too many Christians around the world stood by during the most terrible genocide in history, the Shoah. There were notable exceptions, but most of us in Canada, Europe, the United States and elsewhere did nothing to honour the second great commandment -- to love one's neighbour as oneself.

Canada's shame is well set out in *None Is Too Many* by Irving Abella and Harold Troper. During all of WW2, fewer than 4000 Jewish refugees were permitted entry to Canada and that on arrival they were subject to expulsion if they failed to find a job within six months.

The progress made since WW2 is now threatened in part because Holocaust survivors are leaving us. We live in a more fractured world, where instead of harmony and legal, political and social equality, too many pursue violence. Canada and the entire responsible international community must deter aggression against minorities by regimes and terrorists much more effectively.

As our chair tonight, Rabbi Reuven Bulka, has said, "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."

### ***The Devil That Never Dies***

A book published in 2013, *The Devil That Never Dies, The Rise and Threat of Global Antisemitism*, by Daniel Goldhagen, formerly of Harvard, is important. The thesis is that antisemitism has exploded in recent decades, insinuating itself into the minds of millions of persons globally.

Three of its key points:

- Christians were wrongly told for centuries that Jews, rather than Romans, killed Jesus; 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).
- Muslims are erroneously told that Jews 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 falsehoods have been repeated by antisemites over the centuries, but Goldhagen adds that the Internet provides such toxic writing unlimited opportunities for anonymous posting, chatting, tweeting and other social networking.

## **Faith Communities under Siege**

Iran and Iraq are examples of persecution against Muslims. In the first, some Shiites harass and have done much worse to Sunnis; in Iraq, Sunni radicals-mostly ISIS currently-do the same to Shiites. In India, some Hindus abuse Muslims. Moderate voices calling for peace and reconciliation are today stilled in many nations.

Among other oppressed faith minorities, the hardest hit by ISIS are the Syriac Catholics and Orthodox. Chaldeans, Melkites, Maronites and Armenians have also suffered terribly. How many know that an estimated 80 per cent of those persecuted for their religion across the world today are Christians (See, for instance, [http://www.david-kilgour.com/2016/DK\\_Mar122016\\_Christian-Calling-to-Defend-Human-Rights.pdf](http://www.david-kilgour.com/2016/DK_Mar122016_Christian-Calling-to-Defend-Human-Rights.pdf)).

If all faith communities 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.

## **Berlin Conference**

Last week in Berlin, 140 parliamentarians from around the world took part in the latest Inter-Parliamentary Conference for Combating Anti-Semitism, hosted by the German Foreign Office and its Bundestag. “The fight against anti-Semitism is our common duty as a state and as citizens,” said Chancellor Angela Merkel, making it that there is no place in Germany for any form of xenophobia, whether done by established residents or new arrivals.

## **Conclusion**

The desecration of Jewish synagogues and cemeteries has tragically increased in recent years across the world. Across Canada, approximately 1600 antisemitic incidents were reported in 2014. Silence can easily be perceived as endorsement of such acts.

What the world desperately needs is a human world view-respect for each other as individuals.

Raoul Wallenberg’s courage and actions in Budapest showed the way to a better future for all. He stood up in a near hopeless situation to draw a line in the sand. We need to remind ourselves of this daily.

Thank you/merci.