

Speech by Ambassador Benny Dagan at the Memorial for the Victims of the Holocaust on January 27, 2009

The General Assembly of the UN, on the initiative of my country the Jewish state, designated this day as an annual international day of commemoration to honor the victims of the Holocaust and to reject any denial of the Shoah. Jan Eliasson the then president of the General Assembly presided over this historic session.

It is a moment to be absolutely frank; it is not time to hide behind obscure and unclear language. It is our obligation and duty to those who perished and to those who survived to embrace the truth and voice our concerns.

I will speak to you on this issue in the name of my father in law, Dov, Berl, Ben Yakir, Silbiger, born in Nowy Sącz, Poland, survivor of the hell of Auschwitz, no. 161600 tattooed on his arm.

I will talk to you not only as representative of my country the Jewish state, Israel but also on behalf of Dov and his friends. Dov lost everything, but not his self respect and dignity, not his hope for a better world and not his trust in human beings.

He is sick with Alzheimer and does not remember what happened but he still wakes up screaming in the middle of the night. The horrors cannot be erased from his mind, the horrors he suppressed so that he could give his children a future without terrible memories and without hate. Dov would tell you, as Elie Wiesel wrote in his book, *Night*: "My eyes were open and I was alone – terribly alone in a world without God and without man".

He would tell you with great dismay that anti-Semitism did not end in 1945 after the Nazis were defeated, not even here in Sweden as we have seen in recent weeks.

This is the country of Raul Wallenberg and others who rescued Jews in big numbers with unbelievable courage and determination. Wallenberg didn't wait for UNSC, or EU statements; he acted the way he acted because for him it was a moral choice, not a matter of legality, not a matter of consensus or collective decision.

He rightfully became a national hero, a symbol, and has been embraced by his people because he made an individual moral choice and was ready to face the consequences of his actions.

This is a country that certainly deserves our great admiration and gratitude. But it is also the country of neutrality, the country in which people, like in a lot of other countries in Europe, collaborated with the Nazis and harassed Jews. It is a country that did not persecute war criminals who found safe haven here, a country that some of its people profited from the war.

The Forum for Living History and others here have contributed immensely and courageously to expose this troubling reality. Through their meticulous historical research and profound sense of responsibility for next generations they have revealed and brought to the attention of the Swedish people their findings.

It is indeed confusing, but the Swedish people and its governments deserve our admiration for their readiness to look deeply inward into their own souls and reflect seriously and maturely on these painful times and experiences.

We didn't have the luxury, or some would say the dilemma, to choose. Dov would tell you how lucky you were here in Sweden to make that choice to continue your journey towards 2 hundred years of peace. For us it was a century of almost no choice, our fate was determined by our race. For us it was a century of almost complete annihilation and total destruction. But we made it also a century of rebirth and fulfillment of the ancient dream of Zion, through the national movement of the Jewish people - Zionism.

We established a strong, viable and prosperous state, the state of Israel that absorbed many of the survivors and along the years has fulfilled its mission as homeland and refuge for Jews in need and distress from all over the world.

We were given no choice, but nevertheless we made our choice not to become victims, to transform our despair, our endless rage, our fears, our trauma, our disappointment from progress and humanity, from indifference and neutrality to a new hope. We concentrated our efforts on rebuilding ourselves as a proud and successful nation. That has been our greatest victory over total evil and darkness. That has been our finest hour.

In 1920, one, Adolf Hitler found the “cure” for the disease called "Judaism": "do not think that you can fight the disease without killing its cause, without exterminating the germ. The influence of Judaism will never disappear as long as our bodies are not purged of the cause of this plague – the Jew".

When these words were first uttered, they reflected the opinion of a marginalized minority. They were dismissed as the statements of an eccentric loudmouth. But the Nazi, anti-Semitic and racist affliction, which was not nipped in the bud, quickly spread and took hold of an entire continent. If only we acted then, if only we spoke out then, we could have averted not just the personal tragedy of Wallenberg but also the ensuing global catastrophe thereafter.

This is the language of the leaders of Iran, now the power house of anti-Semitism and denial of the holocaust. They talk about my country and my people as a cancerous tumor that has to be removed. They have embarked on a military nuclear program that if not stopped by the international community will certainly be a danger to world peace.

We are safe in the state of Israel and we know no fear for our existence, but we remember how right Herzl was when he declared: “anti-Semitism was a catastrophe for Judaism, but it was no less a catastrophe for the entire civilized humanity”. Let us remember that the anti-Semitic excesses of the Nazis merely foreshadowed the catastrophe which was to befall mankind in Europe. Yes, history doesn’t repeat itself exactly as it happened, but those who forget its lessons are condemned to live it again.

Let us remember the slogans on the T shirts in the streets of Durban, South Africa in 2001 international UN conference against racism – “One bullet one Jew”. Let us not be complacent when we review now the draft resolution for Durban 2 in April which resembles the circus of anti Israeli, anti Semitic old new speak of Durban 1 that singled us out. We and Canada have made our choice and we are not going to participate in this horror show of hatred and incitement.

Each and every country has to make its moral choice, either to participate and become even if unwillingly part of it or to draw the red line and declare clearly right now, we are not going to be there. There is no room for neutrality. You either save the UN that was conceived in the spirit of the prophets of Israel, born out of an anti-Nazi alliance after the tragedy of World War II, or you help degenerate it into a club of animosity.

The leadership of Iran has been allowed time and again to use the platform of international organizations including the general assembly of the UN to incite against my country and against the Jews in general by repeating the language of Hitlerism. Too many didn't walk out in protest; no statements of condemnation were made by the government of this country or its opposition until this day. Frankly, we would have expected from this bastion of democracy, International law, and human rights to come up with a strong joint action in this matter. We are waiting patiently because we know it will happen eventually.

Climate change is important, but changing the ugly climate against my state and my people at the UN is also important. Baltic Sea cooperation is important, but one can make a sea of change just by raising his or her voice. Transatlantic coordination is important, but translating the power of morality into real action against those who openly and shamelessly seek our destruction, is also important.

Ahmedinijad got what he wanted, to talk about extermination and annihilation casually as if you talk about what you eat in your breakfast, or what you are going to wear for dinner, it has become part of civilized legitimate discourse that Jews do not have the right to have their own state, and if they do, it is conditioned upon their proper behavior. The Israeli Ambassador to the UN, the late president Herzog said in 1975 in his famous speech, against the shameful resolution that equated Zionism with racism that "Hitler would have felt at home on a number of occasions during the past year, listening to the proceedings in this forum".

That attitude of dismissing Nazi-like rhetoric gave way and indeed even emboldened the Iranian regime to go on with these manifestations of acrimony. It allowed for yet another exhibition mocking the holocaust. Today the English and Arabic editions of a book about the "fiction" of the Holocaust are presented at a ceremony in Tehran with a message from Ahmadinejad to be read out with the attendance of a number of government officials.