Learning from the past ~ lessons for today

The Holocaust Memorial Day Committee in association with the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform and Dublin City Council
### Programme

- Introductory remarks, Yanky Fachler
- Address by the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese
- Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, read by Mary Banotti, MEP
- Message from Mr. Pat Cox, President of the European Parliament, read by Oliver Donohoe, Chairman of the Holocaust Memorial Day Committee
- Choral interlude, Christ Church Cathedral Choir
- Quotation from Lutheran Pastor Martin Niemoeller, read by Mr. Peter Cassells, Executive Chairman of the National Centre for Partnership and Performance
- The Jews of Hungary, read by Suzi Diamond
- *The Past is Myself*, read by Nicholas Bielenberg
- *The Gossamer Wall, Poems in Witness to the Holocaust*, written and read by Micheal O’Siadhail
- The Roma, read by Jon Zatreanu
- Speech by Solomon Plassy, Bulgarian Minister for Foreign Affairs, at the OSCE Conference on anti-Semitism, Vienna 2003, read by Marilyn Taylor
- Hubert Butler, read by John Bowman
- *Kindertransports*, read by Geoffrey Phillips
- *Tommie’s story*, read by David Reichental
- *Shoah*, written and read by Máire Mhac an tSaoi
- *Go home from this place...* read by Mr. Michael McDowell TD, Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform
- One Minute of Silence
- Choral interlude, Christ Church Cathedral Choir
- Candle-lighting ceremony in memory of the victims of the Holocaust
  - Representatives of the people with disabilities
  - Representatives of the homosexual community
  - Representatives of the political victims
  - Representatives of Christian victims
  - Representatives of ethnic minorities
  - Representatives of the six million Jews
- Prayer for the Repose of the Souls of the Departed recited by the Very Rev. Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Pearlman, Chief Rabbi of Ireland
- *El Malay Rachamim* Memorial Prayer, recited by Cantor Alwyn Shulman
- Closing remarks, Yanky Fachler
The Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust
Summary of the Declaration endorsed by 44 countries, issued in January 2000, on the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1945.

We, the governments attending the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, recognise that the Holocaust was a tragically defining episode of the 20th century, a crisis for European civilisation and a universal catastrophe for humanity. In declaring that the Holocaust fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilisation, we share a commitment to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust, and to honour those who stood against it. The horrors that engulfed the Jewish people and other victims of the Nazis must forever be seared in our collective memory. With humanity still scarred by genocide, anti-semitism, ethnic cleansing, racism, xenophobia and other expressions of hatred and discrimination, we share a solemn responsibility to fight against these evils. Together with our European partners and the wider international community, we share a commitment to remember all the victims who perished, to respect the survivors still with us, and to reaffirm humanity’s common aspiration for a democratic and tolerant society, free of the evils of prejudice and other forms of bigotry.

Message from Pat Cox,
President of the European Parliament

The Holocaust was a catastrophe of global proportions – but it was also a very European catastrophe. As we gather in Dublin to commemorate the tragedy of those of who perished, and as we reflect on the humiliation and despair of those who survived, we must also remember that this evil enterprise was planned and executed by Europeans, against Europeans, on European soil. The Europe that emerged from the ravages of the Second World War had witnessed the unforgivable nightmare of the Holocaust, and faced the challenge of finding homes for the millions of refugees. The founding fathers of the European Union, many of whom had themselves been incarcerated by the Nazis, intended to make war amongst the European neighbours a practical impossibility. This was to be achieved by increased co-operation and understanding between the nations, and by enmeshing their economies so closely together that armed conflict became unthinkable. But the vision of a European Union was not only driven by a belief that this would avoid another war in Europe, it was driven by the belief that economic integration would build the foundation for peace, prosperity and stability. Despite the deplorable upsurge in anti-Semitic and racist incidents in recent times, Europe has absorbed the lessons of the Holocaust. As the European Union looks forward to welcoming 10 new member states, we must all redouble our efforts to fight any form of ethnic intolerance.
Statement by Mr. Michael McDowell TD, Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on the first Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration in Ireland, January 2003

We have come together today in an Act of Remembrance, Reflection and Resolution.

We remember those who perished - their humiliation; their degradation; their suffering; their despair; their agony and their destruction.

We remember their hope betrayed; their cries unheard; their love mocked; their humanity ravaged; and their spirits broken.

We reflect on the unparalleled barbarity of the Holocaust; the unprecedented pre-meditation of its perpetrators; their unrequited hatred; the indifference of others; their cowardice; the prejudice; the bogus rationalisations; the cruelty; the unleashing and setting of man against man; mankind against children; falsehood against truth; and we reflect on how all of these combined within our generation to bring forth from the depths an evil of terrifying proportions.

We resolve that, as the last eyewitnesses to these atrocities begin to enter the autumn of their days, the memory of the suffering and destruction must live after them.

That memory must live, not merely as a warning from history nor solely as a monument to those who were consumed by the flames of hatred and cruelty, but as a lasting testimony to the human values and the virtues which alone stand between us and the same abyss.

In Ireland, we mark this day collectively and for the first time officially in this city.

Although we did not participate collectively in the war which served as the back-drop to the Holocaust, our State’s formative years coincided with the flood-tide of evil which brought it about. We must acknowledge our own failings as a society and as a State in these events.

Although our Constitution was remarkable in its time for its explicit recognition and guarantees for Ireland’s Jewish community, and although our elected Government always upheld in public the rights of those who faced persecution for their race and their religion, and although many good Irish people courageously stood against the persecutors in word and in deed, at home and abroad, it remains the case that our State and our society in many ways failed that Constitutional recognition, whether by tolerating social discrimination, or by failing to heed the message of the persecuted, or by failing to offer refuge to those who sought it, or by failing to confront those who openly or covertly offered justification for the prejudice and race-hatred which led to the Shoah.

The light of history has been shone on many such failings and I think it appropriate today, holding the office that I do, to formally acknowledge the wrongs that were covertly done by act and omission by some who exercised the executive power in our society in breach of the spirit of the Constitution and contrary to the common values of humanity.
Europe –

The iron grip of Nazism held each nation in terror as the stranglehold tightened and spread across the European continent.

Figures relate to the number of Jews that perished in each European country.
The Nazi Holocaust –
a systematic programme
to exterminate the Jews of Europe

- The first concentration camp, Dachau, is established to hold the prisoners arrested after the arson attack on the Reichstag parliament building in February 1933.
- May 1933 – Nazi students and militiamen light huge public bonfires at which they burn books by Jews, communists and other ‘disruptive’ influences.
- 1933 onwards – Jews are expelled from the army, the civil service, professional associations, sports and social clubs.
- 1935 – The Nuremberg Laws strip Jews of citizenship and define them by racial criteria.
- 35,000 Jewish war veterans who had won medals for bravery during WWI lose their privileges.
- 9 November 1938 - pogrom known as Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass), approximately half the synagogues in Germany are burned to the ground, and many more, as well as homes, shops and businesses, are damaged. The Jewish community is fined one billion Reichsmarks to pay for the damage that the Nazis themselves had caused.
- 170,000 men, women and children die in Nazi euthanasia programmes targeted at the mentally and physically disabled.
- Between 1939 and 1940, 100,000 Jews die in labour camps.
- Following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, SS mobile murder squads known as Einsatzgruppen murder over two million civilians, most of them Jews.
- Some 500,000 Jews die in ghettos from starvation and disease.
- 1,600,000 Jews and thousands of Gypsies die in purpose-built gas chambers fed by exhaust fumes from stationary diesel engines.
- 30,000 Jewish partisans fight the Nazis in Eastern Europe.
- More than a million Jews fight in the Allied armed forces.
- Between 19 April and 16 May 1943 – 7,000 Jews are killed in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.
- One million Jews, 70,000 Christian Poles, 23,000 Gypsies, 15,000 Soviet prisoners and thousands of others die at Auschwitz.
- Of the 300,000 Jews who go into hiding, pretend to be Aryans or have false identity papers, 100,000 die after capture or betrayal.
- Out of 18 million Jews living in Europe before the war, 12 million remain after 1945.
Between 1938 and 1941, the regime of Hungary's Admiral Miklos Horthy passed a number of anti-Semitic laws. Hungary officially joined the Axis Powers led by Nazi Germany in 1940, and thousands of Hungarian Jews died in the first years of the war. By 1944, the world knew of Nazi Germany's Final Solution, yet Hungary continued to pass further discriminatory laws against the Jewish community of 825,000, the third largest in Europe and the second largest as a proportion of the total population. Their entire possessions were confiscated, from silver spoons to factories, from wedding rings to bank accounts. Jews could no longer hold professional positions, own or work in shops, or occupy public spaces, even footpaths and park benches.

In March 1944, the Germans invaded Hungary upon learning that Horthy was planning to pull Hungary out of the war. Between April and August 1944, 437,000 Jews were deported by Adolf Eichmann, bolstered by his 200-man Sonderkommando, assisted by Hungarian police, gendarmes, soldiers and civil servants. More than half the Hungarian Jewish population, mostly living in the villages and smaller towns, were transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau where the crematoria and gas chambers worked at peak intensity.

In April 1944, two Jews, Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler, escaped from Auschwitz, made their way to Slovakia, and wrote a report which reached the Pope, the King of Sweden, and President Roosevelt. The Hungarian government also read this report and in June, Horthy, who remained Regent of Hungary, ordered a temporary halt in the deportation of the Hungarian Jews.

However, Horthy soon gave in to new pressure from Hitler and the planned deportations recommenced. Then Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler halted proceedings once again. He had begun negotiating clandestinely
with the Allies, and had prepared a special section of Bergen-Belsen for Hungarian Jews who were considered suitable for exchange purposes. Almost 2,000 Hungarian Jews reached safety in Switzerland through this programme, but the deportations to the death camps resumed once more.

The virulently anti-Semitic Arrow Cross Hungarian party, headed by Ferenc Szalasi, replaced Horthy's Regime in October 1944. The new government slaughtered 600 Jews in the first days, and the killing continued until the very day that Red Army troops liberated Budapest in January 1945. By this time, over 565,000 Hungarian Jews had perished in the Holocaust.

The courtyard behind Budapest's Great Synagogue in Dohány Street served as the departure point for Nazi transports to concentration camps. The synagogue, one of the largest in the world, had been built in 1859 close to a major thoroughfare as an expression of the optimism of the Hungarian Jewish community. Among the famous composers who played on the five thousand tube synagogue organ were Franz Liszt and C. Saint-Saens. The founder of modern Zionism, Theodore Herzl, was born close to the synagogue and celebrated his Bar Mitzvah there.

At the rear of the synagogue is a small park named after Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who saved 20,000 Budapest Jews by issuing papers and documents that facilitated their safe passage out of the country. The synagogue has a Holocaust memorial resembling a weeping willow whose leaves bear inscriptions with the names of those that perished.

Around the precincts of the synagogue stand tombstones, a permanent memorial and testament to those mown down where they stood sixty years ago. Jewish law usually prohibits burying the dead on the consecrated soil of a synagogue, but it was considered fitting to leave these markers where the men, women and children once stood.

In June 1944 the first group of deportees from Debrecen were sent to the concentration camps. Brother and sister, Terry Samuels and Suzi Diamond came from Debrecen. Their mother survived the camps but died of typhus after liberation. Terry and Suzi were among the group of five children in Bergen Belsen brought to Ireland by Dr. Bob Collis after the war.
On 28 October 1938, the Gestapo tried to deport thousands of Polish Jews back to Poland. The Poles refused them entry, and several thousand Jews remained for months in the no-man’s hamlet of Zbonszyn. They lived in stables and pigsties, their bare existence sustained by a trickle of foodstuffs smuggled across to them by charitable organisations. When Herschel Grynszpan, a young Jewish student in Paris, heard of his family’s suffering in Zbonszyn, he entered the German Embassy and shot the first person he met – the third secretary, Ernst Vom Rath. In retaliation, the Nazis launched Kristallnacht – The Night of Broken Glass – on 9 November 1938.

Kristallnacht had an instant impact on world public opinion. Within a week, a deputation including Chief Rabbi Hertz of Great Britain and Chaim Weitzmann, later to be President of Israel, persuaded the British Government to allow Jewish child refugees into Britain. The first Kindertransport (child transport) left Berlin by train via Holland in December 1938. The children arrived in London’s Liverpool Street Station where they were met by their volunteer foster parents or representatives of hostels and boarding schools. Over the next 10 months, Kindertransports brought almost 10,000 children aged between two and eighteen years, from Germany, Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Each child clutched a small suitcase holding their most cherished possessions. Most of the children never saw their parents again. Four of these Kinder went on to become Nobel Prize winners.

Liverpool Street Station symbolised safety and freedom for thousands of Kindertransport children. As a mark of gratitude to the citizens and government of Great Britain, a permanent monument was unveiled in the station in September 2003. Für Das Kind (For the Child) depicts a young girl standing beside a giant glass suitcase that contains original artefacts donated by Kinder (former child refugees). The girl is a life cast of an actual descendant of one of the Kinder. The sculpture was commissioned by World Jewish Relief (formerly the Central British Fund or CBF), the organisation that spearheaded and funded the Kindertransports between December 1938 and September 1939. The unveiling ceremony in Liverpool Street Station was performed by Sir Nicholas Winton, who was knighted for rescuing 669 children from Czechoslovakia via Kindertransports.

Sculptrress Flor Kent, who was inspired by an original suitcase brought to Britain by one of the Kindertransport children, says: “I trust that its universal message of hope will be widely recognised.”
Shoah
by Máire Mhac an tSaoi

Máire Mhac an tSaoi's poem Shoah was inspired by a visit to Vienna where she saw Alfred Hrdlicka's Monument against War and Fascism on Albertina Square. The monument depicts an old Jew scrubbing the streets with a nailbrush, a reference to the 1938 Anschluss when Vienna's Nazi masters rounded up Jews and ordered them to remove anti-Nazi daubings and slogans.

As Gaeilge
An seanóir Giúdach ar a cheithre cnámha,
Ualach sneachta ar a ghualine,
Cianta an rogha ina ghnúis –
‘Mar seo,’ adeir an t-lomhá miotail,
‘Do sciúr mo chine “leacacha na sráide”
I Wien na hOstaire, leathchéad bliain ó shoin –
É sin, agus ar lean é –
Ní náire feacadh í láthair Dé –

Ach sibhse, na meacain scoiltithe,
Bhur gcoilgsheasamh ar bhur “gcuaillí arda”,
Nil agaibh teicheadh ón aithis:
Ársa na mBeann crapadh go hisle glún,
Beatha na n-éag insa láib,
Ar a chosa deiridh don mbrútach!

English translation
The old Jew on all fours,
A load of snow on his shoulders,
Ages of having been chosen in his features –
‘In this way’, said the metal figure,
‘My people scrubbed the paving stones of the street
In Austria’s Wien, half a century ago –
That and what followed it –
No shame in bowing down in God’s presence...

But you, the mandrakes
Standing bolt-upright on your ‘lofty stilts’,
You’ve no escape from defilement:
The Ancient of the Peaks crushed to the knees,
Living death in the mud,
And the Brute on his hind legs!”

Translated by David Sowby
During the evil years of the Nazi regime, good men from all walks of life in many countries, did something to prevent the triumph of evil.

The Hitler Plot, 20 July 1944

At Ireland's first Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration in January 2003, the role played by Fritz-Dietlof Graf von der Schulenburg and Peter Bielenberg in the 1944 July Plot to assassinate Hitler was publicly acknowledged for the first time. If the plot had succeeded, the war could have been shortened, the slaughter ended, and the lives of millions of Jews saved.

Like many of his class, von der Schulenburg initially became a Nazi, but by 1939 he was part of the military opposition to Hitler. Hiding behind the cover of his military career, he participated in the failed plot to kill Hitler during the victory parade in Paris in June 1940. In the July Plot of 1944, the plotters intended to make von der Schulenburg State Secretary in the Reich Ministry of the Interior. When the plot failed, he was arrested, appeared before the "People's Court" in Berlin on 10 August 1944, condemned to death, and was hanged that afternoon. In the court he said he did not regret what he had done, and that future generations would understand.

Peter Bielenberg was a young German lawyer married to Anglo-Irish Christabel Burton (named after the suffragette Christabel Pankhurst.) She was a music student in Hamburg who had sung with John McCormack. Peter and Christabel moved to Germany after their marriage in 1934. Because Peter refused to join the Nazi party, he could not practice law, so he volunteered for the army. He and Christabel were so appalled by Kristallnacht in 1938, that they decided to settle in Ireland. An anti-Nazi friend, Adam von Trott zu Solz, convinced Peter that it was his patriotic duty to stay in Germany and fight Nazism. Peter and Christabel continued to associate with anti-Nazi circles.

Von Trott and several of the other plotters were tried and hanged from meat hooks. Peter was arrested by the Gestapo. Pulling strings with Nazi acquaintances, Christabel visited Peter. He managed to plant in her palm a matchbox that carried a message outlining the story he
had told his interrogators about his involvement with the plotters. Armed with Peter's alibis, and with typical effrontery, Christabel turned up at Gestapo headquarters, demanding to be interrogated. Angered by the treatment of another interviewee, she famously told her interrogator to switch off the lights. Playing up her Irish roots (her mother was from Corofin) and her family links with the press baron, Lord Rothermere, who at one time had been sympathetic to the Nazis, she bluffed her way through the interview, using Peter's concocted stories. Peter was released to an army punishment camp, but slipped away and was reunited with his family in the Black Forest.

In 1948, Peter and Christabel settled on a farm near Tullow in County Carlow with their three children. Two of the Bielenberg sons married two of von Schulenburg's daughters. Christabel's autobiography The Past Is Myself, was published in 1968, translated into seven languages, and was later turned into a BBC drama. Christabel helped to set up a fund for the families of the Resistance to Hitler, and routinely confronted Holocaust deniers such as David Irving. Peter and Christabel lived the rest of their lives in Ireland. Peter died in 2000, followed two years later by Christabel who died in November 2003.

Sister Paula

Von der Schulenburg's artist sister, Tisa (Elisabeth), was a confirmed anti-fascist who shocked her family by marrying a Berlin Jew in 1928. The couple fled to England in 1933, where Tisa joined the anti-fascist Artists' International Association. Later, she worked as an artist with the Durham coal miners. She attended her father's funeral in Germany in 1938, causing her to be refused re-entry at Croydon airport. Hated by the Nazis because she was a communist, Tisa was barred by the British for being a Nazi! She spent the war years in Germany, and it was at her home that her brother Fritz-Dietlof first met von Stauffenberg, the one-armed officer who placed the suitcase bomb in Hitler's lair.

After the war, Tisa became a nun in an Ursuline Convent in Westphalia, taking the name Sister Paula. Here she spent the rest of her life, producing some of her most powerful work. She addressed the horrors of the Holocaust in a series of harrowing prints and bronze reliefs for the Jewish museum established by the Ursuline Nuns in the small town of Dorsten.
Scholar, teacher, writer, and traveller, Hubert Marshall Butler was an Anglo-Irish Protestant born in Kilkenny in 1900. He passionately encouraged pluralism in Ireland, and was one of those rare individuals who really made a difference. Butler has often been described as “Ireland’s moral conscience.”

In the spring of 1938, Butler read a newspaper report of a protest meeting in the Mansion House, London, discussing the plight of European Jewry. The Archbishop of Canterbury spoke of “the systematic persecution without parallel even in the Middle Ages and the incredible mental and moral torture” to which Jews in Germany were being subjected. Subsequently, Butler went to work with The Religious Society of Friends at the Quaker International Centre in Vienna.

Butler worked closely with Emma Cadbury in the Vienna Centre, processing the paperwork of Jews and others desperate to obtain exit visas. Between 1928 and 1939, the Vienna Centre handled over 11,000 applications affecting 15,000 people. The Centre managed to help over 4,500 people settle in other countries. During Butler’s time at the Quaker International Centre, he and his colleagues helped 2,408 Jews leave Austria.

Soon after he arrived in Vienna, in July 1938, Butler attended the Evian Conference on Refugees. There, he discovered that no country was prepared to offer a safe haven for Jewish or other refugees from Nazism. Butler returned to Vienna furious and disheartened. In *Stemming the Dark Tide*, Sheila Spielhofer gives an insight into the huge task facing the Vienna Centre: “Faced with apparently insoluble problems and living in a country where hatred, intolerance and violence seemed to triumph, the workers at the Centre as well as the Vienna Group were in danger of falling into a state of despondency and inertia.”

At the Centre, Butler helped set up *The Kagran Gruppe*, an agricultural co-operative of Viennese Jews and people whose Jewish connections were only partial, such as a Jewish spouse or grandparent, who had banded together for collective emigration. Butler recounts the story of Erwin Strunz, an ‘Aryan’ with a Jewish wife. Strunz had been a trade union secretary. He had no friends abroad, and with a small son and a newborn baby, the family could not cross on foot over the mountains into Switzerland. Strunz’s refusal to divorce his Jewish wife put him in great danger. Following warnings that he was on a list for arrest and deportation to Dachau, Strunz was advised by a Jewish friend to visit the Quaker Centre.

In Strunz’s document, *My Connection with the Kagran Group in 1938* (unpublished), he writes: “I was soon befriended by Hubert Butler, a tall aristocratic looking Irishman with kind blue eyes that could quite easily flash with righteous indignation at the many instances of beastliness that made the life of Vienna of 1938”.

Every morning, the members of the Group took the long tram journey to Kagran, a suburb on the banks of the Danube. There they worked under the supervision of Gestapo guards who were amused at the sight of middle-class Jews, including elderly and children, who had never held a shovel before, toiling at heavy manual labour. Meanwhile, Butler and his colleagues tried desperately to get entry permits for the *Kagran Gruppe* as migrant workers to Peru, Bolivia, Rhodesia, Colombia, Canada,
England and Ireland. The Kagran Gruppe became a vehicle by which approximately 150 people obtained exit permits from Austria. Ultimately, very few members of the Kagran Gruppe actually settled in Ireland, most of them put down roots and remained in Britain.

Butler was instrumental in creating the Irish Co-ordinating Committee for Refugees. This was a cross-section of highly regarded Irishmen from both the Catholic and Protestant traditions working together. They attempted to secure temporary settlement for refugees in Ireland.

The themes of collaboration and the collective human conscience fascinated Butler. In 1988, he published The Children of Drancy, the title of which was inspired by the infamous transit camp outside Paris from which thousands of French Jewish children and adults were packed into cattle trucks in the summer of 1942 and deported to Auschwitz.

Butler often reflected on the way people react to evil. In The Children of Drancy, he writes: “Hitler brought into the world misery such as no man had previously conceived possible. It had to be combated. The British were slow to observe this. The Irish never did.” Information about the Holocaust reached Ireland during the war years, and the Chief Rabbi of British Mandatory Palestine (and former Chief Rabbi of Ireland) Isaac Herzog, sent telegrams throughout the war to Eamon de Valera, expressing the urgent need to take in refugees. But as Butler had noted, the mood in Ireland was one of “ignorance and indifference”.

Butler’s concern for injustices done to others prompted him after the war to investigate the wartime genocide conducted by the viciously anti-Serb Orthodox Christian and anti-Semitic Ustashe regime in Croatia. In particular, he highlighted the case of Andrija Artukovic, the former Croat Minister of the Interior, whom the Yugoslavs were trying to have extradited from the US for war crimes. Like so many other former members of the Nazi-sympathising Croatian government, Artukovic was helped to escape by powerful interests, including Roman Catholic clergy. In documents shown to him in New York, Butler discovered that Artukovic had also spent time in Ireland in 1947.

During a public meeting in Dublin in 1952, Butler’s denunciation of the ecclesiastical role in the Ustashe genocide led to a walkout by the Papal Nuncio. Butler and his family were ostracised, and he was forced to resign from the Kilkenny Archaeological Society which he had founded. At the Butler centenary in October 2000, the mayor of Kilkenny finally apologised publicly for the failure to acknowledge Butler’s account of the truth, all those years earlier.

In his long life of 91 years, Hubert Marshall Butler was a staunch advocate of truth and justice. He became champion of many who had suffered injustices, and will be remembered as a great humanitarian.
One European country stands up to Hitler

In March 1941, King Boris III of Bulgaria and Prime Minister Bogdan Filov signed a pact with Nazi Germany making Bulgaria an Axis partner. When the Bulgarian legislative assembly passed anti-Jewish measures, including a law to take “all necessary steps to solve the Jewish question,” the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church protested to the prime minister. Bishop Stephan, the Metropolitan of Sofia, threatened government ministers with excommunication. Dimo Kazasov, the editor of Bulgaria’s largest newspaper, wrote an open letter to King Boris III and the Legislative Assembly, claiming that their actions were dishonouring the entire Bulgarian people. Kazasov’s letter precipitated other individuals and organisations to publicise their opposition.

In early 1943, the Nazis demanded that the Bulgarians deport 20,000 Jews to death camps in Poland. In the first week of March, Bulgaria was unable to prevent 11,000 Jews from the annexed territories of Macedonia and the Thrace region of Greece, areas run by the Nazis, from being loaded into boxcars and shipped to Treblinka. Further boxcars were lined up in Sofia’s train station to receive the first wave of Jews from Bulgaria, but when word of the imminent deportation leaked out, protests were held throughout Bulgarian society. When the Deputy Speaker of the Assembly, Dimitar Peshev (a former justice minister) was warned of the imminent deportation of Jews from his hometown, Kyustendil, he persuaded 42 legislators to send a petition of protest to the King.

Urged by the head of the Sofia Jewish Community, Bishop Stephan travelled to the Royal Palace and demanded an audience with the King. He told him that failure to halt the handover of Jews to the Nazis would result in all churches and monasteries being instructed to actively hide Jews. Bishop Kyril, the Metropolitan of Plovdiv, intervened successfully with the King to prevent the round up of 1,500 Jews marked for deportation. Faced with street demonstrations by professors, doctors, lawyers, students, labour leaders and peasants, the King halted the deportation.

Despite intimidating pressure from Hitler, the King used deception and delaying tactics to avoid taking action against the Jews. He instructed his prime minister to mobilise all Jewish able-bodied men into labour camps where they worked on fictitious public works. The Nazis eventually gave up. In a confidential report to the SS, the German legation in Sofia complained: Bulgarian people are democratic and practice religious tolerance. Bulgaria is a country void of anti-semitism and respects the achievements of all people.

Monument in the centre of Plovdiv, with the inscription: “To all who helped to save us on 10 March, 1943. From the grateful Jewish Community of Plovdiv.”
For their bravery and determination in preventing the deportation of the 49,000 members of Bulgaria's Jewish community, Bishop Stephan, Bishop Kyrl, Dimitar Peshev and Dimo Kazasov were later designated Righteous Gentiles by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Authority in Jerusalem, Israel.

At the International Conference on the Holocaust in Stockholm in January 2000, Bulgarian President Peter Stoyanov pointed out that while 6 million Jews were sent to their deaths by the Nazis, the Bulgarian people remained committed to European humanitarian values:

*By their dignified and courageous behaviour, in the face of strong Nazi pressure, the citizens of Bulgaria rescued their Jewish population from deportation to the death camps. I believe that our greatest contribution to European civilization in the outgoing century has been the saving of tens of thousands of human lives, each of whom is worth more than any precious work of art.*

What is more, the Bulgarians did that expecting no applause from anyone, least of all from history. Hardly anyone thought of rewards in those difficult times! The Bulgarians committed this courageous act in the firm belief that they were doing the most natural thing on earth: helping someone in trouble, helping one’s Jewish fellow countryman, classmate, friend, neighbour; in fact doing one’s humane duty.

The concrete facts from the dark years of the Second World War testify to the power of public opinion, the ethics of tolerance, caring and compassion with people in need. Despite the restriction of Jewish rights endorsed by the Bulgarian government then or the humiliating yellow stars Jews had to wear, the Bulgarian people today have every reason to feel proud of their courage to care and save from deportation and death nearly 50,000 Bulgarian Jews.
It is the end of 1944, a very cold winter in Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp. We are huddled in a room trying to get a little warmth. We have a stove but we don’t have any wood for it. I am 9 years old and I do not understand what is happening. I am totally indifferent to the situation, no joy or play like a normal child.

My brother is 4 years older, he is only with us because my mother lied about his age at the selection process in the detention camp “Sered” in Slovakia. The men went to one side and the mothers and children went to the other side. One group to live and one group to die.

My brother decided to go out to find some wood, I follow. Maybe we will find some wood to light a fire in the stove. In the distance there is some building going on, wood is lying around. We are passing a large pile of dead bodies, the stench is terrible but we have become used to it, now we hardly notice it. The bodies are not collected any more as the bulk of the SS have moved to the front line to fight. Only the Wermacht (the ‘Dad’s Army’) is guarding the camp. We find some short pieces of wood and run back to our barrack. We hide the wood under one of the beds by the door.

We live in a small room, a total of 6 people in all. My Aunt Margo is the “Block-Elterste”, polite interpretation “lady in charge”. She got the job at the time of our arrival. We had to go on “Appeal”, or Call Up, to see that nobody is missing. My Aunt Margo just tried to get everybody in line. The SS man came to her and told her “You will be the Block-Elterste.” As a privilege we got the room at the entrance of the barrack. Everybody else, mothers and children, were in a large room which covered the whole floor.
Suddenly there is shouting and a commotion outside. “Were is the Block-Elterste?” An SS woman in polished boots, immaculately dressed, very superior not only in looks but also in her stance and attitude. You can feel it, everybody is trembling. “Somebody was seen running with wood which was stolen and ran to this barrack,” said the SS woman. My aunt and everybody else stood to attention. It was the rule, whenever any SS person came near to us everyone had to stand to attention. She came to the room, my aunt was beside her. We stood to attention. My mother Judith, my brother Mickey, my cousin Chava, my grandmother and myself. The next thing the SS woman started to lift up the blankets from the sides of the beds and started looking underneath them. We had six beds. We had put the wood under the bed beside the door, it was the last bed as she was looking around. We are terrified. We know that if she finds the wood then the punishment will be severe, beatings, kicking in some cases until the person is dead. She checks under five of the beds where nothing is hidden, turns around and says “there is nothing here, let’s check the main room.”

We are safe, we have been given another chance to live.

Tommie Reichental

The Gossamer Wall, Poems in Witness to the Holocaust

By Micheal O’Siadhail

Arrivals

Clamourings for water, even a handful of snow. By day the glimpsed places, in the dozed night Groans or bickering until their wagons slow And crash open in a station’s eerie floodlight. Uncanny ordinariness. ’No Baggage’, they’re told. A dozen SS men with a stony indifferent air Move among the arrivals questioning ’How old? ’Healthy or ill?’ and pointing either here or there. Men won’t abandon wives. ’Together afterward,’ They’re reassured. Some mothers unreconciled To leaving small children are soon transferred: ’Good,’ they say, ’Good, just stay with the child.’ A finger is pointing. Caprices of fate allotted. Frozen silence of lives unseamed and parted.

Faces

Neat millions of pairs of abandoned shoes Creased with mute presence of those whose Faces both stare and vanish. Which ghetto? Warsaw, Vilna, Lodz, Riga, Kovno. Eight hundred dark-eyed girls from Salonica Bony and sag-breasted singing the Hatikvah Tread the barefoot floor to a shower-room. Friedländer, Berenstein, Menashe, Blum. Each someone’s fondled face. A named few. Did they hold hands the moment they knew? I’ll change their shame to praise and renown in all The earth... Always each face and shoeless footfall A breathing memory behind the gossamer wall.
Even though Gypsies (Roma or Romani) were not specifically mentioned in the Nuremberg Laws, they became one of the largest victim groups after the Jews. They were deprived of their civil rights, sent to ghettos and concentration camps, used in medical experiments, and injected with lethal substances.

Because of the lack of documentation, it is still difficult to estimate how many European Gypsies perished in the Holocaust. Most observers believe that it could be as many as a quarter of a million. In 1939, they were no longer permitted to travel freely and were forced into encampments which were later transformed into fenced ghettos. Those not placed in concentration camps were expelled from Germany in 1940 to the territories of occupied Poland. In the camps, Roma were forced to wear black triangular patches (asocials) or green triangles (professional criminals.)

On 16 December 1942, the extermination of all Gypsies was ordered. Vichy France deported 30,000 Roma to Nazi concentration camps, the Croatian Ustashe government killed tens of thousands of Roma, and the Romanians deported thousands to Transnistria (then part of the Ukraine, today a breakaway republic of Moldova) where many died of hunger and disease. Stripped of all their documents and identification papers, the Roma who survived Transnistria and the Displaced Persons camp at Baragan, were considered no longer to exist. Their lack of formal identifications has exacerbated the problems of the Roma people up to the present day.

In 2003, the Jewish community in Prague agreed to host the first-ever conference on the genocide of the Roma during the Second World War. Two members of the Roma community living in Ireland recall the impact of the Nazi Holocaust on their people:

In the Holocaust 1940-45, I lost my grandfather and grandmother. It was a very tremendous loss for my father at that time. I hope it never happens again.

Jon Zatreanu, Co-ordinator of Education, Roma Support Group at Pavee Point Travellers’ Centre, Dublin

Starting in 1941, the Nazi regime in Romania destroyed many Roma families. Among those murdered were my grandmother and other family members. All the atrocities that happened during those years bear a horrendous impact and devastation on my family right up to the present day. I do not want this genocide to happen again, the killing that destroyed children, parents and grandparents.

George Dancea, Director, Roma Support Group at Pavee Point Travellers’ Centre, Dublin

### Gypsies murdered 1939-1945

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Russia</td>
<td>42,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roumania</td>
<td>36,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>35,000</td>
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<td>Croatia</td>
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<td>Hungary</td>
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<td>Germany</td>
<td>15,000</td>
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<td>France</td>
<td>15,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>12,000</td>
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<td>Austria</td>
<td>6,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bohemia</td>
<td>6,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>2,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>1,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>231,800</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
American poet Elisabeth Murawski wrote Lullaby of the Train after reading a young adult pictorial biography of Anne Frank which included a photograph of gypsy children. Lullaby of the Train won third prize in The Davoren Hanna Poetry Competition 2003 and has previously been published in The Dubliner magazine.

With eyes like empty begging bowls
the orphan gypsy girls
have stopped complaining
of shoes that pinch
their toes, of dresses
with holes. The town
clock releases
a knight on horseback,
announces the hour.

The children can't tell
time yet. Numbers
on paper, they shuffle
forward, too weary
and hungry to cry
or look back.

The German nun waves
to her charges, obedient
as shadows. Click clack
go the wheels
kissing the railroad track,
lullaby of the train.

Click clack, click clack
to the smoky town in Poland.

How could this have happened?
Pastor Martin Niemoeller was arrested in 1937 for preaching against the Nazis, and spent until 1945 in Sachsenhausen and Dachau concentration camps. After the war, he was instrumental in producing the “Stuttgart Confession of Guilt” in which the German Protestant churches formally accepted guilt for their complicity in allowing the suffering caused by Hitler’s reign. His famous response to a student’s question: How could this have happened? serves as a constant reminder about the danger of racism:

First they came for the Communists,
But I was not a Communist so I did not speak out.
Then they came for the Socialists and Trade Unionists,
But I was not a Socialist or Trade Unionist, so I did not speak out.
Then they came for the Jews,
But I was not a Jew so I did not speak out.
Then they came for me,
But by then there was no one left to speak out for me.
In January 2003, Mr Dick Roche TD, Minister for State at the Department of the Taoiseach with responsibility for European Affairs, visited the site of the Warsaw Ghetto. He read some of his diary entries to the audience attending the Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration in Dublin City Hall. This is an extract from his diary:

I met a ghost today. His name is Marian, Marian Turski. Marian survived the Ghetto and Auschwitz. He took me on a tour of the area where the Warsaw Ghetto stood. There is in fact nothing left of the ghetto - not a stone upon a stone.

The entrance to the Ghetto is now an empty space. Here there is a monument, not the most elegant memorial, bas reliefs on blue granite. The most remarkable feature is that the granite was imported from Sweden to build a monument to celebrate Hitler's victory in Poland. I laid a wreath at this monument.

Beside the main structure there is a smaller memorial consisting of two low circular devices. The first of these is little more that a damaged ring of granite with a bronze plaque referring to the ghetto and what happened in that place.

The second, also circular, has a carving of a palm branch and the Hebrew ‘B’, the first letter of the first word of the Old Testament in Hebrew. The shape is meant to represent a sewer. The sewers were the gateways into the ghetto when the area was sealed off. The ghetto is gone but the sewer still exists, deep under the ground.

Later we stared into the sewer exit, a deep fetid steaming hole. The exit is to be found in the very heart of the Jewish cemetery. The cemetery was outside the ghetto when the fateful events of 1943 took place. It is an extraordinary graveyard. Thousands of graves and memorials with the names of some of the most distinguished Jewish families of Europe. Families who contributed to literature, medicine, the arts and industry - all gone.

Death camp survivor and Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal became the conscience and voice of the millions of victims of the Holocaust.

The only value of nearly five decades of my work is a warning to the murderers of tomorrow that they will never rest. It is not a written law that the next victims must be Jews. There can also be others. We saw it begin in Nazi Germany with the Jews, but people from more than twenty nations were also murdered. Hatred can be nurtured anywhere, idealism can be perverted into sadism anywhere. If hatred and sadism combine with modern technology, the inferno could erupt anew anywhere.
The Award of “Righteous Among the Nations”

During the long night of the Holocaust, among the few points of light were the actions of the men and women who risked their lives to save the lives of Jews. Their actions show us that compassion, courage and morality were not totally extinguished in those dark years. Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Authority in Israel, has conferred the title “Righteous Among the Nations” on over 19,000 people throughout the world. Inscribed on the medal they receive is the Talmudic saying: “Whoever saves a single life is as one who has saved an entire world.”

Excerpt from the address at the Holocaust Commemoration ceremony at Terenure Synagogue on 26 April 1995 by Taoiseach John Bruton.

We in Ireland have not been immune from the bigotry and the indifference which manifested itself in Europe this century. Ireland’s doors were not freely open to those families and individuals fleeing from persecution and death. Some people did find refuge and comfort in Ireland, but their numbers were not very great. We must acknowledge the consequences of this indifference. Tonight, on behalf of the Irish Government and people, I honour the memory of those millions of European Jews who died in the Holocaust. I also recall the gypsies and the homosexual community who were marked down for extermination and all those who were persecuted for resisting the Nazi tyranny.

Rest of Their Days

By Renata Katz

Barbed wire, dying soldiers, mud everywhere!
Cold day, frosty electrical fence
Emaciated bodies looking through the meshed gate!
Unimaginable devastation in the eyes
Of those who survived.
Their belief in the human race gone
With the perished ones!
No one can estimate or even comprehend
Their immense pain!
Their faces say it all,
They are the ones who have to live with it
For the rest of their days!
Among all the horrible sights, perhaps the most chilling exhibit of all seemed harmless at first glance. It was a design for an extermination camp neatly drawn and certified under the heading of a firm of German architects ‘Established in 1890’ or some similar date. I pictured those respectably dressed draughtsmen in their old-fashioned office, quietly working out the details of how to exterminate their fellow human beings as efficiently as possible. These Nazi extermination camps were the final death blow to early twentieth century belief in progress and human perfectibility.

Science the benefactor had acted here as science the destroyer.
All it takes for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.

*Edmund Burke*

In May 1995, the Rotary Club of Listowel unveiled the only public Holocaust memorial in Ireland, in the Garden of Europe, Listowel, County Kerry. The following is an excerpt from the address delivered by Paddy Fitzgibbon on that occasion:

Our generation, and the generation or two after us, will be the last that will be able to say that we stood and shook the hands of some of those who survived.

Go home from this place and tell your children and your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren that today in Listowel, you looked into eyes that witnessed the most cataclysmic events ever unleashed by mankind upon mankind. Tell them that you met people who will still be remembered and still talked about and still wept over 10,000 years from now – because if they are not, there will be no hope for us at all. The Holocaust happened and it can happen again, and every one of us, if only out of our own sense of self-preservation, has a solemn duty to ensure that nothing like it ever occurs again.
MEMORIAL DAY

HONOURED GUESTS
Mr. Terry Samuels – Bergen-Belsen
Mrs. Suzi Diamond – Bergen-Belsen
Mr. Tommie Reichental – Bergen-Belsen
Mrs. Doris Segal – Sudetenland
Mr. Geoffrey Phillips – Kindertransport
Mrs. Rosel Siev – Aurich, Germany
Mr. Zoltan Zinn-Collis – Bergen-Belsen

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The Holocaust by R.G. Grant, Hodder Wayland, 2000
Never Again by Martin Gilbert, Harper Collins 2001 © Martin Gilbert
Lullaby of the Train by Elizabeth Murawski, as published in The Dubliner 2003

PHOTOGRAPHS/ILLUSTRATIONS
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Für das Kind: courtesy of World Jewish Relief, London
Budapest gravestones: courtesy of Great Synagogue
Plovdiv photographs: courtesy of Plovdiv City Council
Yellow star and gas canister: courtesy of the Imperial War Museum, London
Ghetto songbook: courtesy of the executors of Prof. and Mrs. I. Weingreen
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