

Holocaust Remembrance Day 2021: Message of the Universal Esperanto Association

Each year on January 27, we mark Holocaust Remembrance Day, a day of mourning for the millions who lost their lives, and a day of celebration of those brave individuals who helped save the lives of others who would have perished. The Universal Esperanto Association remembers most particularly the thousands of Esperanto speakers who perished, and, among them, the members of the family of L.L. Zamenhof, the creator of Esperanto. Zamenhof's language was singled out for particular vilification in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

On the day after Hitler's army entered Warsaw, the Zamenhof family was rounded up. L.L. Zamenhof's son Adam was arrested and, early in 1940, shot; his daughters Zofia and Lidia were murdered in Treblinka, along with his sister Ida, in 1942. Only Adam's son, Ludwik, miraculously survived, thanks not only to his own ingenuity but also to the protection afforded him and his mother by Father Marcelli Godlewski, of the Parish of All Saints in Grzybowski Square, Warsaw. Father Godlewski, and others like him, thus helped keep alive the hope that is contained in the very name of Esperanto.

Polish historian Zofia Banet-Fornalowa has memorialised some of the best known of Hitler's Esperanto-speaking victims, and German historian Ulrich Lins, in his book *Dangerous Language*, has given us some sense of the extent of the murders, but many others died largely unknown and too easily forgotten.

The Esperanto movement mourns particularly those believers in internationalism and international understanding who, either because of their race or physical condition or because of their political or social convictions, perished at the hands of the Nazis. They included numerous Esperantists in Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and elsewhere. They included Esperantist civil servants, teachers, doctors, journalists, poets. And among the survivors were also Esperantist heroes who shielded others from extermination.

This is also a day when we remember those who did not or could not stand up to this tyranny and butchery; and we pledge, with the example of the Holocaust before us, to resist injustice wherever and whenever it occurs. We may perhaps remember the words of the Esperantist poet Leen Deij, writing in 1948 and mourning a Jewish neighbour, but expressing sentiments that relate to all peoples and all religions.

Ni sentis kompaton kaj monon kolektis, dum kelkaj el ni la infanojn protektis.

Sed Auschwitz *ekzistis!* Nu, kion plu diri? Ke mi kaj ke vi... ni lin lasis foriri.

And some will say: "We did the best we could, Gave money, sheltered children..." Well and good.

Yet Auschwitz *happened* – all that we can say is: "You and I – we – let him walk away."

(trans. Elizabeth Stanley)

The Universal Esperanto Association honours the memory of the many Esperantists who perished at the hands of the Nazis and recognizes the generosity and bravery of those who defied the forces of terror to save those few who, threatened with murder, survived.

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