

Statement of the Universal Esperanto Association on Holocaust Remembrance Day

27 January 2018

Each year on January 27 the United Nations marks Holocaust Remembrance Day, the date of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp erected by the Nazis as part of their programme of genocide. It is a day of mourning, an annual pledge never to forget those who died nor the monstrosity of the genocide that destroyed them, and a day when the peoples of the world are urged to say the words “Never Again” – never again should such acts of barbarism be allowed to take place.

The Esperanto movement mourns particularly those believers in internationalism and international understanding who, either because of their race or because of their political or other convictions, perished at the hands of the Nazis. They included every direct descendant of Lazar Ludvik Zamenhof, the founder of Esperanto, save one, and numerous other 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 a day, too, 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 stand up to injustice wherever and whenever it occurs. We may perhaps remember the words of the Esperantist poet Leen Deij, writing in 1948, and expressing sentiments that relate to all peoples and all religions.

Al la juda foririnto

Li fermis la kofron, manpremis – adiaŭ!
Sen ia protesto li iris... Hodiaŭ
mi tion komprenas; li povis nur miri,
ke mi, la kristano, lin lasis foriri.

Kun kapo klinita la kofron li portis.
Li iris la vojon al Auschwitz kaj mortis
sen ia protesto... Li povis nur miri,
ke mi, la kristano, lin lasis foriri.

Kaj iam la filo kun filo parolos,
kaj tiu demandos, la veron li volos.
La mia silentos... kaj povos nur miri,
ke mi, la kristano, lin lasis foriri.

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.

To the Jew who walked away

He closed the suitcase lid, he shook my hand,
And said farewell, and could not understand.
He made no protest – What was there to say?
And I, the Christian, let him walk away.

With head bowed low, his suitcase at his side,
He took the road to Auschwitz, where he died
Without a protest. What was there to say?
And I, the Christian, let him walk away.

One day, his son – suppose his son should live –
Will look for answers, which my son can't give.
He'll turn to me, and I shall have to say
That I, the Christian, let him walk away.

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)

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