

## SPEECH FOR THE FIRST MINISTER OF WALES, CARWYN JONES AM

Good afternoon. The purpose of Holocaust Memorial Day is to ensure that the Holocaust's horrendous crimes against humanity are never forgotten, and that its relevance for each new generation is fully understood. It communicates our conviction that the politics of hate will never triumph, and it symbolises our resolve to safeguard the future by understanding the past. For let us be clear, nothing compares to the Holocaust. Not in the intensity of its evil; not in the suffering of a people made to suffer precisely because they were a people; not in the ghastly scope of its inhuman ambition; not in the combination of twisted ideas and wicked actions that, for a time, threatened to engulf our world.

The scale and the process of the mass killings of the Holocaust were unprecedented and the death camp at Auschwitz, liberated on this day January 27<sup>th</sup>, 65 years ago, has endured as its most powerful symbol.

Survivors of this dark episode in European history become fewer and fewer as the years pass, and so it becomes all the more important to study and teach this subject, in order to keep it alive in the popular memory, and to try to understand and prevent future genocides.

The term 'genocide' was first coined by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jew in 1944 in the wake of the Holocaust. He defined it as the systematic and intentional mass killing of a group - usually involving civilians, women, children, and innocent people - on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, political belief, or social-economic status. These genocidal acts encompassed not only 'killing members of the group', but also 'causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group', 'deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part', 'imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group' and 'forcibly transferring children of the group to another group'.

The twentieth century was a dark century of mass murder. The murder of civilians during the First and Second World Wars set a pattern to be repeated many times in different regions of the world in the second half of the century, and estimates put those who were deliberately extinguished by acts of politically motivated carnage in the last hundred years at over a staggering 200,000,000. **200 million**, .....of whom over 75 million have died in the last 60 years.

In the early part of the twentieth century there had been the massacre of an estimated 1 million civilians in Armenia.

When Hitler addressed a meeting of SS units in August 1939, in preparation for the Polish campaign, he went on to tell them 'to kill, without pity, men, women and children', suggesting that there would be no repercussions. The world was in a destructive mode.

After the Nazi genocide of Jewish people in the Second World War became publicly known and acknowledged, the slogan '*nie wieder*' ('never again') became current. Indeed, the 1948 UN Convention, the first truly universal, codified statement on genocide, enshrined within it the promise of 'never again'.

However, 'never again' has been shown to be meaningless, an empty phrase, as mass killings occurred across the globe in the post-war era - in Ethiopia by the Dergue, in Cambodia by the Khmer Rouge, and in Indonesia and East Timor by the Suharto regime. With the occurrence of so many episodes of mass murder, the motives for genocide have become the subject of much soul searching: who ordered the mass killings and why? Certainly, the events in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda in the 1990s have brought the subject more widely into the popular awareness and more firmly onto the international political agenda.

Can genocide be predicted or prevented? Unfortunately, lessons from these dark episodes in the history of the twentieth century have not so far been learnt. Yet surely history can teach us policy-makers, organisations, and indeed individuals many things, if only we care to heed them. By studying these genocides carefully - the intentions of those in power, the motivations of the perpetrators, the experiences of the victims and the role of the bystanders future genocides could perhaps be predicted and even prevented or at least curtailed. However, over 60 years have passed since the framing of the UN Genocide Convention, and yet the record of the United Nations in predicting and preventing genocide has not been good. The international community as a whole cannot be proud of its response to cases of genocide around the world. In certain instances, the reaction has been to provide no help at all; in many others, it has been a case of too little and too late.

Leading nations have been unwilling to intervene directly to prevent genocide, but we have an example to set and a part to play in its prevention, through both intervention and relief effort. It is now widely acknowledged that the atrocities perpetrated against the Fur people in Darfur by the Sudanese government constitute genocide. The work of the Janjaweed militias is characterised by burning, rape, pillage, and the mass murder of entire communities. We should hope for better from the international community, but we as individuals bear an equal responsibility.

Barack Obama called it 'the audacity of hope' yet there is nothing audacious about hoping. It is in our nature. Without hope we are nothing. The courage of those who have stood up and fought injustice, whose acts of unprecedented bravery in the face of overwhelming odds have often defied reason, must stand as a beacon to light the way to a 21<sup>st</sup> century of peace where genocide is no more, and human beings co-exist in harmony, regardless of race, colour or creed. They bequeath us their legacy of hope.

Two such brave persons have died within the last three weeks, two heroic women, their ages spanning the century, whose courage exemplified individual resistance to the Nazis during the Holocaust. Freya von Moltke,

who died at the age of 98, came from a wealthy German family, fought the abuses of the Nazi regime, and sheltered Jewish people throughout the war in her native Berlin. Her husband Helmut was executed for treason. And Miep Gies, a Dutch citizen, who gave shelter from the Nazis to the Frank family, and bequeathed the world Anne Frank's diary. She died January 11th aged 100.

I am proud today to reaffirm Wales' commitment to the ongoing memory of those who died in the Holocaust, to honour those survivors, and to fighting racism in all its forms. We will continue to oppose it, wherever it is found.

I would now like to invite our very own Cardiff centenarian, Queenie Watts, whose life runs parallel to the cataclysmic events of the last hundred years, to light the Memorial Flame.

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