

The following was presented at the Association's 2008 Annual General Meeting by David D Knoll, Immediate Past President of NSW Jewish Board of Deputies:

## DENYING HITLER A POSTHUMOUS VICTORY

According to a 1941 census, Hungary, including the recently annexed territories, had a Jewish population of 825,000, less than 6 percent of the total population.

This figure included 100,000 converts to Christianity who, under Hungarian race laws passed between 1938 and 1941, were classified as Jews.

The Hungarian racial laws were modelled on Germany's Nuremberg Laws. They reversed the equal citizenship status granted to Jews in Hungary in 1867. Among other provisions, the laws defined "Jews" in so-called racial terms, forbade intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, and excluded Jews from full participation in various professions. The laws also barred employment of Jews in the civil service and restricted their opportunities in economic life.

It gets personal.

In some Hungarian cities, **we** Jews were compelled to live outdoors, without shelter or sanitary facilities. Food and water supplies were dangerously inadequate; medical care was virtually non-existent. Hungarian authorities forbade **us** from leaving the ghettos and police guarded the perimeters of the enclosures. Individual gendarmes often tortured and extorted personal valuables from us, Jews. None of these ghettos existed for more than a few weeks and all the ghettoed Jews were sent to their deaths within days.

In mid-May 1944, the Hungarian authorities, in coordination with the German Security Police, began to systematically deport **us**. SS Colonel Adolf Eichmann was chief of the team of "deportation experts" that worked with the Hungarian authorities. The Hungarian police carried out the roundups and forced the Jews onto the deportation trains.

On 22 June 1944, when my mother was just 7 years old, Antal Dezso and other Jewish employees of Tungram (including Dezso's younger sister, Ilus, were ordered to move in and live at the factory.) Dezso took with him two teddy bears; one was fawn-coloured to remind him of his daughter's beautiful hair and the other was white to remind him of his wonderful wife. On 22 June 1944, Dezso, Ilus and the other Jews were deported from that workplace. Dezso was never seen by his family again.

Antal Ilona, my grandmother, then tried to obtain false documents in the form of a "Schutzpässe". Apparently, her salon supervisor had a connection. This lady was called Kato. Her husband, whose name was Kornel, had become aware of an escape route to Sweden. Application was made to the Consul, Raoul Wallenberg, for a Swedish passport for Ilona Berman and her daughter. My mother, Judy, found out much later that the documents arrived at the Lipotvaros apartment just one

day after the Nazis had arrested my grand mother, Ilona.

After Dezso was taken away, Ilona made an arrangement with my mother's nanny to take care of her should she be arrested like her husband, before the Swedish documents arrived.

Ilona was indeed arrested not long after the Nazis rounded up all the remaining Jews on the block, and she was taken to a town square called "Kisok Palya" and then transported to her death.

We know that Consul Wallenberg personally pulled people from trains and tried to ease the suffering of others on marches with truckloads of food, water, blankets and medicine. He was however unsuccessful in securing Ilona's release from the train that transported her to her death.

Kato then took Judy to her small home, which was only a few blocks away from where the Antal family had lived, and hid her. My mother's bed was their bathtub. She stayed there until the winter. She was spared the excesses of the Arrow Cross regime which in November 1944, ordered the remaining Jews of Budapest into a ghetto which, covering an area of 0.1 square miles, became temporary residence to nearly 70,000 people.

On Christmas Eve 1944, Maria Lapedus, Judy's nanny, known to the Antal family as Tantika, came to collect her. It was a trudge of many hours in the snow, but it was safest to go on foot. Tantika took her little charge in as if her own daughter. Tantika's home was a small house in a garden suburb of Budapest. It was not an area where Jews were known to live, and no one thought to challenge the little 7 year old girl as a Jew. Instinctively Tantika did not contact other members of Judy's family until the war had ended. This wise move probably saved my mother's life. Although her other relatives may have guessed where she had been hidden, they too did not attempt to make contact. They stayed out of touch until the war had ended. Then, a few weeks after Budapest was liberated, my mother's maternal aunt, Mariska, came to collect her.

Jutka moved in with Mariska and her sister in law Claire. Claire moved to Australia in 1946, and 10 years later sponsored my mother to immigrate to this country.

We now know from the Red Cross that Ilona was transported to Venusberg, a subcamp of Flossenburg. Jorg Skriebeleit from the Flossenburg memorial site kindly searched the records to find details of what happened to Ilona. The records however came to dead end. Ilona may have died in forced labour, on the 14 April 1945 death March to Mauthausen or simply from untreated illness.

Dezso's last known place of being alive was recorded by the Nazi's as Allach, a subcamp of Dachau on 12 April, 1945. It would seem that my grandparents parents died within days of each other never knowing the others fate, no doubt praying that their daughter had been safely hidden.

I tell the story for two reasons, especially in this Museum to which so many of us are

dedicated, because as survivors and descendants and as the guardians of both our history and our future we have a duty to deny Hitler a posthumous victory, and we risk become bystanders or even victims again.

My thesis today is that we run just that risk if we only talk about the antisemitism of history and not the antisemitism of the present and the future.

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While we urge our friends in the non-Jewish world to aid us in this effort, the principal duty continues to rest with the Jewish people. Not because it should, but because it does.

For us it is an obligation to fulfil the 614th commandment of the Jewish covenant.

The Torah of course contains only 613 commandments.

The 614th commandment was penned by the late Emil Fackenheim. It is: "Thou shalt not give Hitler a posthumous victory."

Born in Halle, Germany, in 1916, Fackenheim was affected profoundly by the Holocaust. As a rabbi and philosopher, he spent his life trying to understand its meaning, writing dozens of books on the subject, including "To Mend the World".

He is perhaps most famous for his assertion that after the catastrophic event, Jews have not only 613 commandments to obey, but 614. The last commandment, Fackenheim asserted, was to be actively Jewish, thus denying Hitler a posthumous victory.

Jews are, that is, under a sacred obligation to survive. After the death camps, Jewish existence itself is a holy act: Jews are under a sacred obligation to remember their martyrs: Jews are, as Jews, forbidden to despair of redemption, or to become cynical about the world and humanity, for to submit to cynicism is to abdicate responsibility for the world.

Are these not the very sacred obligations that underpin human freedom?

To insist on hope in the face of despair. To insist that children are filled with love of their neighbour rather than the polemic, and today too often, the theological polemic of hate for one's neighbour.

Hungarian Jewry before World War II, despite the *numerus clausus*, and other harbingers of trouble, believed in the dignity of man, but did not see articulating an obligation to their non-Jewish neighbours as part of their obligations as Jews. By not doing so they did not do the one thing that was essential to their human survival, even in an open democratic society. They did not insist that they were to be in every respect the equals of their non-Jewish neighbours.

The Catholic Church 40 years ago led the way in jettisoning theological antisemitism. That is worth celebrating, but *Nostra Aetate* is still a work in progress. The moral courage has been expressed, the visual symbolism has become great,

and now the hard work at the operating levels of our communities must be undertaken. We must continue to work to overcome the pockets of Christian — and today it is largely protestant Christian — theological antisemitism — and its transmogrification in the Islamic World — that continue to exist and which operate as a renewed threat to Jewish political and religious security across the world.

British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks speaks of an 'unholy alliance' between the Left, the far-Right and the Islamic street' that is resulting in millions being indoctrinated with the idea that alone among nations, Israel has no right to exist and that all the troubles of the world are the work of the Jews'. In an interview with BBC Radio 4's Sunday programme, broadcast on 1 January 2006, Dr Sacks admitted he was "very scared" by the rise in anti-Jewish feeling, which had led to Holocaust denial, attacks on synagogues and a boycott of Jewish groups on university campuses.

In Europe today, most Jews are at least anxious. Some are scared, and many have already left for Israel or the United States. Because even though many European governments have condemned the new rise in antisemitism, there is a clear perception among many Jews that Europe's terrible history is somehow coming back to life.

Robert Wistrich holds the Neuberger Chair for Modern European and Jewish History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Since 2002 he has been director of the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism at that university. In an interview on CNBC a few years ago said: "Jewish communities around the world are under more pressure now than at any time since 1945," says of Hebrew University in Israel. Wistrich is the son of Polish Jews who fled the Holocaust. "Here we are 60 years after that and what lessons have been learned? Not enough."

Manfred Gerstenfeld, interviewed in the same program had this to say: "says the constant demonisation of Israel by the European media and the European left has helped create what he calls a "new anti-Semitism" against the "collective Jew"; that is, Israel and Zionism.

"All studies show that Anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism almost entirely overlap," he said. "Now, of course, it is very bad to say you are against the Jews after the Holocaust, so you have found an escape clause to be against the Jews without saying you are against the Jews. And you say I am against Israel, applying standards to Israel that you do not apply to any other nation." And pithily, he added: "The terrorists have allies in European society."

What Gerstenfeld meant was that radical Islam and Christian theological antisemitism have identified the one thing they have in common, Jew-hatred, and they are both exploiting it.

The antisemitism exhibited in the Islamic World, and this is not new, is sourced in Europe, and it in turn feeds back in to Western antisemitism.

It is now abundantly clear that "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" - used by Nazis to stir up hatred of Jews even though it was long known to be a forgery — is again

being circulated, this time by Muslim scholars and Islamic Governments. There is much antisemitic literature, journalism and TV in Arab countries. No effort is made to diminish or confront such blatant racial hatred.

Let us not allow the disguise word "Anti-Zionism" to comfort us that criticism of Israel is not about Jew-hatred.

Anti-Zionism is not about opposing Zionism. It is not about legitimate criticism of Israel, either.

Zionism is the proposition the Jewish people just like other peoples of the earth should have the right of self-determination.

Anti-Zionism is the proposition that all peoples, but not Jewish people, should have that right. It is racist, and it is motivated by hatred of Jews as a people.

Phyllis Chesler, the noted American left-wing feminist was interviewed by the National Review on 26 November 2003. In the course of that interview she identified this very pattern of painting a moral nation — Israel or the Jewish people (let's argue the interchangeability later) as immoral. The accuser who commits the crime daubs the victim as perpetrator. The victim is astonished at the audacity of the fraud, and expects society to expose the deception. But in the case of antisemitism, instead, too often, there is silence. Intelligent observers who are entirely capable of discerning this deception in most cases, display a distinct myopia when the target of the deception is Jewish.

Antisemitism today rears its ugly head in the form of demonisation of the State of Israel, and it has already travelled the short step from hatred of the collective Jewish identify to hatred and violence against each individual Jew; a step that has become a march on some European and Middle Eastern streets.

To achieve that goal, we must do all we can to influence the perception of Israel and of the Jewish people in the public arena. If the public space is one in which Israel and the Jewish people are perceived positively, society at large will condemn attacks upon Jews. If the public space acquiesces in expressions of antisemitism, then both verbal and physical abuse of Jews will be tolerated. While this is an oversimplification, the lesson is being learned in a sharp, and indeed painful, way across western European society and on North American campuses.

When Jews actively engage, as Jews, in strengthening the social fabric of our society, and at the same time, plant amongst others with whom Jews engage, a positive perception of the Jewish people and indeed Israel, the void will be filled in a positive way and the risk of negative perceptions filling the void will be reduced.

Everyone in our community is capable of helping build the bulwark against antisemitism. Advocacy is about reaching out, engaging in positive conversations and winning friends for Israel and the Jewish people.

Every conversation counts towards making antisemitism socially unacceptable in

Australia and every conversation counts towards generating a positive perception of Jews, Judaism, Israel and the Jewish people in the public arena.

It is no longer acceptable if it ever was for any Jew who interacts with the non-Jewish world and I include necessarily our community's finest ambassadors, the guides at this Museum, to say "we are apolitical" and decline to discuss accusations aimed at Israel. If one Jew does not defend another, we become bystanders by choice.

Violence — whether physical or verbal — against Jews is not socially acceptable. Why should we be aghast if it occurs in Australia, and not speak up when it occurs in Israel?

Why is the threat of such violence not as in need of public exposure as the act of violence itself?

It was 2007 and not 2006 (the year of the Hizbollah conflict) that saw a peak in antisemitic incidents in Australia.

Whoever is able to protest, the Talmud warns us, against the transgressions of the world and does not, is liable for the transgressions of the world.