

Speaking notes for The Honourable Jason Kenney, P.C., M.P. Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism

At the handover ceremony of the chairmanship of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

**Berlin, Germany
March 5, 2013**

As delivered

THE HONOURABLE JASON KENNEY (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism): Ladies and gentlemen, it's a great honour to be here on behalf of the Government of Canada to welcome you to our embassy and to launch Canada's chairmanship of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Seven years ago, shortly after Prime Minister Harper took office, he immediately asked me to pursue Canadian membership in the ITF. It was peculiar that Canada, a champion of pluralism and human dignity, should not have been a founding member of the task force, particularly given our own Holocaust history. Some of you may think that is remote history, and indeed it is in many ways. But Canada's Holocaust history is a story of tragedy and injustice, but also of redemption.

Before and during the Second World War, Canada adopted what was, according to scholars, perhaps the most exclusionary policy towards European Jewish refugees in the developed world, a policy that became known as the 'None is Too Many' policy with the publication of a book of that title by scholars Irving Abella and Harold Troper 30 years ago this month, a policy which, through various means, sought to prevent the admission into Canada of virtually any European Jews fleeing the oncoming Shoah.

This policy was most notoriously manifested in Canada's refusal to allow the MS St. Louis to enter Canadian waters after it had been rejected of course in Cuba and the United State. The last-ditch effort of the passengers and crew of the MS St. Louis, carrying over 800 European Jewish refugees from Hanover, was to come into port at Halifax.

And a telegraph was sent from Ottawa refusing to allow the ship to enter Canadian waters. Of course, the MS St. Louis then returned to Europe, and many of its passengers went on to be killed in the Shoah.

And that, sadly, reflects the fact that Canada, at most, received a few hundred European Jews between 1936 and 1945.

It is difficult given Canada's global reputation as a champion of human dignity, and indeed as one of the strongest countries in the world in the past several decades with respect to refugee resettlement, to imagine. But it is a history that we ourselves forgot. Although there was, as I say, a kind of redemption when Canada opened its doors eventually to the survivors of the Shoah,

with the exception of Israel and the United States receiving the largest number of Holocaust survivors in the world.

And that is why we are proud this year to take the chairmanship of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

When we began our work to pursue observer, liaison and then full membership status in the ITF seven years ago, we also began the work of, as Government, of being an uncompromising voice and actor against anti-Semitism in all of its forms, because we see in our own country some manifestations of this new and virulent form of anti-Semitism, which is in every instance based on either ignorance of the Holocaust or the ideological effort to distort the historical record of the Holocaust.

And so it is the view of Canada that Holocaust research, commemoration and education is the essential antidote to both the re-emergence of the old anti-Semitism, and indeed of this new virulent and violent form of new anti-Semitism.

And that is why Canada chaired the Inter-parliamentary Coalition on Combating Antisemitism, which produced the Ottawa Declaration, which I've had the honour of signing on behalf of the Government of Canada and which we propose as a useful tool for defining some of the critical elements in anti-Semitism, including Holocaust denial.

And we have faced up to our own sad history. Our Government was the first in Canadian history to formally recognize the exclusionary policy before and during the war towards European Jewish refugees, and we've created a fund that has helped to finance several important research and documentary projects to learn from that period of the St. Louis era. In fact, we funded a large international conference and research project produced by B'nai B'rith Canada on the wartime immigration restriction measures against Jews, and most significantly perhaps we've created a beautiful monument with the participation from the Canadian Jewish Congress, The Wheel of Conscience, designed by the great architect Daniel Libeskind, which now stands at our new National Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax, which is Canada's Ellis Island.

It is at that place where the German Jews fleeing the Shoah in 1938 aboard the MS St. Louis would have disembarked, would have begun new safe and free lives in Canada. And indeed, we have taken a zero tolerance attitude towards manifestations and expressions of anti-Semitism both in Canada and around the world as something reflected in our foreign policy.

So even though Canada was in some senses remote from the Holocaust, it, too, was deeply touched, and we hope to introduce to many of you when you visit Toronto next October, we hope to introduce you to many of the thousands of survivors who are still with us, many of whom make their homes in Toronto, which I believe has the third or fourth largest population of survivors of any city in the world.

I just came from a trip to Ukraine, where I visited Lviv and Kyiv in part to pursue the potential involvement of Ukraine in the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. This trip brought poignantly home to me the huge relevance of the Alliance. Some may think that this is simply

sharing scholarship in a remote kind of fashion between academics and intellectuals, but my trip to the Ukraine reminds me of how urgent it is that the Alliance expands its ambit and includes countries who still have not come to terms with their own history in the Shoah.

This past weekend I visited a small town in Galicia near Lviv called Sambir, one of some 600 mass graves of the victims of the Holocaust of Solitz in today's Ukraine, at the centre of what the late blessed John Paul II referred to as the century of tears and what has now been called by Timothy Snyder the Bloodlands of Central Europe.

And in this small town, there are three mass graves unmarked until recently, when the local town council erected three large crosses atop mass graves containing some 2,000 Jewish victims of a massacre that occurred on Passover in 1943.

I could hardly imagine seeing local residents of that town, including children, passing by these mass graves in obvious ignorance of what had transpired there 70 years ago. And indeed, even they may think it's some kind of a tribute with these large crosses to Ukrainian partisans during the Second World War, knowing nothing about the Jewish civilization that existed in Sambir and all through Eastern Europe before the Shoah.

And so it seems to me that our task, the task of the Alliance, is to ensure that we, by sharing our best practices, by providing positive moral encouragement, we work to ensure that the children of Sambir in the future will know what happened there, will pass by an appropriately marked memorial, will learn in school that the Holocaust happened in their own midst, in their own communities.

I also came from a trip a few weeks ago in Turkey, where I met with the Jewish community in Istanbul, whose primary request to me was for Canada, through Canada's chairmanship, to encourage Turkish engagement in the Alliance, because they said it's so critically important in that country that young people begin to learn the history of the Holocaust.

And so, on behalf of the Government of Canada, I want to thank all of those who have worked on this, including the Belgian chairmanship, for the Alliance in its past many years, but I want to express our desire to energize and constantly renew and expand this important work.

Finally, I'm really glad to introduce to you our chairman for the coming year, Dr. Mario Silva.

Dr. Silva is a distinguished Canadian, a former parliamentarian, a former partisan adversary of mine, although I have to say a very friendly one, and while we disagreed from time to time we never did so disagreeably.

Mario is highly regarded for his work in combating anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust commemoration, and in fact helped to organize the Inter-parliamentary Coalition to Combat Anti-Semitism in Ottawa where he was Vice-Chair of the Steering Committee. And Mario has formerly served on the City Council of Toronto, Canada's largest city, speaks several languages, recently completed his doctorate, and is I think one of the most decorated former Canadian

parliamentarians, having received France's Ordre national de la légion d'honneur, the Order of Rio Branco from Brazil, and the Order of Merit of Portugal, the country of his birth.

He is a very highly regarded Canadian. He is deeply committed to the work of the Alliance, and I would like to thank him for his service. Please join with me in welcoming the 2013-14 Chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, Dr. Mario Silva.