

Speech by Umut Uzer, Ph.D. (Istanbul Technical University)

On the occasion of International Holocaust Remembrance Day

27 January 2014, Kadir Has University, Istanbul

Mr. Deputy Minister

Distinguished Chief Rabbi,

President of the Jewish Community

Director of the Board of Trustees

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Excellencies

Dear Colleagues

Ladies and Gentlemen

In 2015 on the seventieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, Alfred Hitchcock's documentary on the Holocaust will be shown in theaters and TV channels around the world. This documentary is based on British and Soviet footage taken in the aftermath of WWII, which were taken to depositories without being shown to the public. Even for Hitchcock, the master of thrillers and suspense, filming the documentary put a heavy toll on his psychology and proved to be traumatic. This state of affairs demonstrates the fact that real life is much crueler than fiction. Even Hitchcock who scared the public with his movies had to bow his head to the cruelties and the crimes against humanity committed in the camps, and all this left an earmark on his conscience throughout his life.

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According to the Talmud, Whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world.

The reason for this is just as Adam is created individually and for a time he represented the entire mankind, in later generations each person should be perceived and protected as if she/he represents the entire humanity.

The Maida verse of the Holy Quran similarly states whoever kills a soul in the land - it is as if he had slain mankind entirely. And whoever saves one - it is as if he had saved mankind entirely.

In all the monotheistic religions there are numerous commonalities including the belief in peace, the sublime character of human life and friendship among peoples. It would be in order to express the common aspects of different religions so as to establish fraternal relations between peoples. It should be remembered that Turkey's participation as the co-chair of the Alliance of Civilizations under the auspices of the UN has such lofty goals.

Ladies and Gentlemen

As Turkish citizens we are proud for not participating in WW II and thus being far away from the crimes of the Holocaust, and proud of helping and saving Jews having Turkish citizenship. On the other hand, we cannot say the Holocaust is not our concern since the denial of the Holocaust goes hand in hand with anti-Semitism. To prevent this morbid idea to contaminate the country, we need to tell about the horrifying nature of the Holocaust. In this context, numerous exhibitions, and conferences were held in Turkey and recently around 20 academics are taking courses from Yad Vashem on this topic.

Furthermore, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) is training teachers, the Aladdin Project has organized a summer school at a private university, and there has been a seminar at Galatasaray University organized by the above-mentioned organizations and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) on Holocaust education. Also, Turkey has been participating actively in IHRA as an observer country under the chairmanship of Ambassador Ertan Tezgör.

It should also be added that International Holocaust Remembrance day on January 27 has been commemorated for the 4th consecutive year in Turkey with this ceremony you are attending.

Despite all these positive developments, there are certain circles that are not adequately sensitive towards WWII and the Holocaust phenomenon. The fact that in the past few months, on two different occasions, Turkish exchange students in Poland were taken into custody for having made the Nazi salute in the Auschwitz and Majdanek concentration camps makes it essential for us to better educate our youth and all our citizens on this issue. Evidently, these developments cannot be taken lightly. Moreover, the president of the the Aladdin Project Anne-Marie Revcolevschi, with its main goal to consolidate mutual understanding between Jews and Muslims, characterized such acts as emanating from ignorance and lack of education. This is exactly why we need to be better informed about the Holocaust.

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The Holocaust, in line with the national socialist ideology, aimed to destroy all the Jews in the world and dominate the world in its entirety. The victims of the Holocaust were mainly Jews but there were also Romas, Poles, and political opponents who lost their lives during this horrible period in World history.

Turkey's efforts to stay out of World War II are well known. Having said that however, Turkey supported a number of Jews escaping from Nazi oppression by allowing professors from Germany, most of whom

were Jews, to teach at universities in Istanbul and Ankara, and the Jewish Agency to open an unofficial office in Istanbul.

Turkey has a long history of tolerance. Today's ceremony will certainly contribute to the Turkish society's understanding of the Holocaust which is essential for a better comprehension of the past and the future.

Thank you very much.