

IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST

H. E. Naci Koru, Ambassador, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

Very Reverend Chief Rabbi and
Distinguished Head of the Turkish Jewish Community,
Dear Mr. Can Has, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Kadir Has University,
Dear Professor Mustafa Aydın, Rector of Kadir Has University,

Distinguished Participants,

Today is the 27th of January.

69 years ago today, **the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp**, the largest of its kind, was liberated by soldiers of the Soviet Union and the scope of its horror was exposed.

The United Nations, by a resolution adopted in 2005, to which my country was a co-sponsor, designated the 27th of January as a Remembrance Day in honour of the 6 million innocent men, women, children, and babies annihilated in Nazi death trains and death camps; in the gas chambers and in middle of the street.

This year, we are observing the fourth International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust in Turkey, and I would like to extend my gratitude to this years' host, the Kadir Has University, to its Chairman of the Board of Trustees, and to everyone who has endeavoured to make this meaningful day a reality.

Today we respectfully honour the memory of the victims of the Holocaust.

Elie Wiesel, in his deeply moving novel "*Night*", wrote as follows:

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in the camp...

which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed.

Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.

Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.

*Never shall I forget that **nocturnal silence** which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live.*

Distinguished Participants,

An important part of my 33 years of diplomatic service has been spent in European countries. I served 7 of these years in Germany. Like many others, I witnessed the bitter traces of the Holocaust. It is almost impossible to describe exactly, nor to articulate in words, the nocturnal silence to which the Jews were subjected. Last year, while visiting Berlin for a meeting, close to the Residence of the Turkish Ambassador, I walked through "**Gleis 17**" Memorial, the train station, which is one of the major sites of the deportations for the German Jews, where they

started their journey to death. It is very difficult for me to tell you of my feelings about “Gleis 17”.

In 1941, around sixty-six thousand Jewish people were living in Berlin. By May 1945, this number has decreased to seven thousand. In four years, more than fifty thousand men, women, and children from Berlin, mostly Jewish, were transferred to the concentration camps on trains called “**East Transport**” and “**Old Transport**” by the Nazis. From 1942 onwards, the deportation had only one dark destination. Its name was the “**Auschwitz Concentration Camp**”. An exhibition launched soon afterwards about these deportations is therefore entitled “**Special Train Service to Death**”. Almost all of the trains from Berlin departed from the **Grunewald** station platform 17, known as “**Gleis 17**”.

Today this station lies within a forest located in one of the most prestigious and quiet areas in Berlin. When you arrive to “Gleis 17” and see those rails, though, you are able to feel and imagine how tens of thousands of people were sent, train by train, to their deaths on those cold nights.

And when you consider the millions of people delivered to extermination by trains in the thousands, you begin understand the scale of the crime perpetrated against the Jews.

May it always be remembered, may it never be forgotten.

It is our duty to remember these atrocities and take resolute and firm measures to prevent all kinds of racism.

It was with these feelings and thoughts in mind that my government became an observer member to the “The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)”, previously known as the “Task Force for Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research (ITF)”.

The foundation for our decision was the great importance we attach to remembering these atrocities, as well as our belief in the necessity to combat racism, discrimination, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and all kinds of extremism.

In the last four years, Turkey, which is the only Muslim country in IHRA, has effectively participated in and contributed to the activities of the Alliance with a delegation led by Ambassador Ertan Tezgör.

Last year, a widely attended conference on Holocaust education was hosted at Galatasaray University, organised by “Aladdin Project” and “Yad Vashem”. The Aladdin Project held another conference in Bahçeşehir University on Jewish scholars who came to Turkey during the Second World War and launched a summer school relating thereto. The Anne Frank House set off exhibitions at the Kadir Has University, as well as in Ankara. Within a short space of time these exhibitions will also take place in İzmir and Diyarbakır. Furthermore, seminars are given to secondary school teachers on Holocaust education by the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. In 2012, we erected a commemorative monument in remembrance of Turkish Jews at the **Bergen-Belsen** concentration camp in Germany. We consider all these efforts as valuable achievements, and we attach great importance to them.

Distinguished Guests,

The ugly hatred that brought about the Holocaust did not appear in one night. In Europe, anti-Semitism was nourished for centuries by religious intolerance. I regret to say that this racial

hatred continues even today in various forms aimed at different religious and ethnic segments, but first and foremost toward Muslims.

I feel a sense of pride that such kinds of hatred have never flourished on our soil. Beyazid II, the Ottoman Sultan from 1447 to 1512, embraced the Jewish populations who had been expelled from Iberia during the Spanish Inquisition. His grandson, Suleyman the Magnificent, invited to Istanbul Dona Gracia, one of the leading woman figures of Jewish history, who circled the globe fleeing repression before eventually taking refuge in Istanbul.

Recently, I was chatting with the representative of a UN institution in Ankara. He said that he started to get familiar with Turkey and its people while serving previously in India. He recounted his first acquaintance with Sephardic Jews, whose Turkish ancestors moved to India to discover new places 500 years ago. He emphasized that these three thousand some Jewish people, who live in southern India, still feel a deep attachment and affection to Turkey half a century later.

I am sure you are already aware that in the Second World War, Turkey, with a strength inherited from its history and culture, displayed the courage and virtue to stand by the oppressed, at a time when virtually the entire world was watching this inconceivable violence in a deep silence. While many countries were dispatching hundreds of thousands of innocent people first to concentration camps and then to extermination camps, simply because they were Jewish, dissident, or ill, we did not experience such shame on our soil. Today, Turkey once again adopts an approach based on human dignity, embracing hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees. This act will rightfully take its place in history.

In the time of the Holocaust, Jewish professors and scholars escaping from the Nazi regime were warmly welcomed by Turkey. We spared no effort to save these Jews from the concentration camps. The distinguished members of our Jewish community who were admitted to Turkey under humanitarian considerations and who subsequently were granted citizenship made very important contributions to our country's development. It is worth remembering that we take pride in many of our Jewish citizens who acquired worldwide reputation ranging from medicine to physics from arts to literature.

I also avail myself of this opportunity to commemorate our veteran **diplomats, who saved many lives targeted by the Nazi regime** and made us proud of our history, and also the Jewish professors who have so greatly contributed to the improvement of Turkish academia and science.

Distinguished Participants,

Turkey, together with its values rooted in history, will continue to endeavour for the prevention of racism, discrimination, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia as well as extremism of all kinds and to call for peace, tolerance and dialogue.

I thank again the Jewish community and the Kadir Has University for bringing us together on this meaningful day, and I commemorate with respect once again all the victims of the Holocaust.