

**נאום סגן ראש הממשלה ושר החוץ סילבן שלום בעצרת המיוחדת
של האו"ם לציון שישים שנה לשחרור מחנות ההשמדה**

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**Address by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign
Affairs Silvan Shalom to the UN General Assembly Special
Session to mark the 60th Anniversary of the Liberation of the
Concentration Camps**

24 January 2005

Sixty years ago, allied soldiers arrived at the gates of the Auschwitz concentration camp. Nothing could prepare them for what they would witness there, and at the other camps they liberated. The stench of the bodies, the piles of clothes, of teeth, of children's shoes. But in the accounts of the liberators, more than the smell, more even than the piles of bodies, the story of the horror was told in the faces of the survivors.

The account of Harold Herbst, an American liberator in Buchenwald, is typical of many, and I quote:

"As I walked through the barracks I heard a voice, and I turned around, and I saw a living skeleton talk to me. He said, "thank God you've come." And that was a funny feeling. Did you ever talk to a skeleton that talked back? And that's what I was doing. And later on I saw mounds of these living skeletons that the Germans left behind them".

Thousands of years ago the prophet Ezekiel had a similar vision. In one of the most famous passages of the Bible, the prophet describes how he came to a valley full of bones. The bones, says Ezekiel, are the House of Israel. And the bones are dry, and their hope is lost. Faced with this scene, he asks the question: "Shall these bones live? Shall these bones live?"

Ezekiel asked the question that every liberator of the camps asked himself: Can any hope or humanity emerge from such horror? Shall these bones live?

Here with me today, are those who have given life to dry bones, both survivors and liberators. Men like Dov Shilansky who fought in the ghetto and later became speaker of Israel's parliament, the Knesset.

Like Yossi Peled, who after being evacuated from the terrors of the Nazis, eventually became a Major-General in the Israel Defence Forces, to protect his people from the horrors of another calamity.

And like David Grinstein, who survived the labour camps, and now heads an organization for restitution, for the forced labourers under Nazi rule; and women like Gila Almagor - today the first lady of Israeli stage and screen - who has translated her experiences as the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, into art that has touched millions.

When we see what the survivors have managed to create, and build, and contribute to humanity - families, careers, literature, music, even countries - we can only marvel at their strength and courage.

At the same time, when we see what the survivors have given to humankind, we can only begin to appreciate, what might have been given to the world, by the millions who did not survive. We mourn their loss, to this day. Every fibre of our people, feels their lack. Every family knows the pain, including my own - my wife's grandparents and seven of their eight children, were taken and killed.

Mr. President,

Israel and the Jewish people owe a debt to the liberators of the death camps, and so does all of humankind. In the face of unspeakable evil, these liberators, from many nations represented here today, showed the human capacity for good. In the face of overwhelming indifference to the suffering of others, they showed compassion. And in the face of cowardice, they showed bravery and resolve.

We recognize, too, the courage and humanity of Righteous Among the Nations, who refused to look away. People such as Raoul Wallenberg, who saved thousands of Jewish lives, and whose niece, Nane, is here with us today. These heroes helped our dry bones live again.

Mr. President,

The dry bones have lived again not only in the lives of the survivors, but also in two entities established on the ashes of the Holocaust: the United Nations and the modern State of Israel.

The tragedy of the Holocaust was a major impetus in the reestablishment of the Jewish people's home, in its ancient land.

As Israel declared in its Declaration of Independence:

"The Holocaust, which engulfed millions of Jews in Europe, proved anew the urgency of the re-establishment of the Jewish state. A state which would solve the problem of Jewish homelessness, by opening the gates to all Jews, and lifting the Jewish people to equality in the family of nations."

And indeed, since its establishment, Israel has provided a haven for Jews facing persecution anywhere in the world. At the same time, it has built a society, based on the values of democracy and freedom for all its citizens, where Jewish life and culture and literature and religion and learning - all those things which the Nazis sought to destroy - can flourish and thrive.

The fact that so many survivors came and played their part in the building of the State of Israel, was itself a remarkable fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy. As the prophet said:

Thus says the Lord: Behold, O my people, I will take you from the graves. I will put my spirit in you, and you shall live in your own land, in the land of Israel.

Mr. President,

If Israel represents one heroic attempt, to find a positive response to the atrocities of the Second World War, the United Nations represents another. The very first clauses of the UN Charter bear witness to the understanding of the founders, that this new international organization must serve as the world's answer to evil, that it comes, and I quote: "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war," to "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights" and "the dignity and worth of the human person".

By convening here today in this historic special session, we honour the victims, we pay respect to the survivors, and we pay tribute to the liberators. We convene here today for those who remember, for those who have forgotten, and for those who do not know. But we also convene to remember that the Charter of this United Nations, like Israel's Declaration of Independence, is written in the blood of the victims of the Holocaust. And we convene today to recommit ourselves to the noble principles, on which this organization was founded.

Such an affirmation is needed today, more than ever. The past decade has witnessed a chilling increase in attempts to deny the very fact of the Holocaust. Unbelievable as it seems, there are those who would delete from history, six million murders.

Could anything be worse than to systematically destroy a people, to take the proud Jewish citizens of Vienna, Frankfurt and Vilna and even Tunisia and Libya, to burn their holy books, to steal their dignity, their hair, their teeth; to turn them into numbers, to soap, to the ashes of Treblinka and Dachau?

The answer is yes, there is something worse: To do all this and then deny it. To do all this and then take from the victims - and their children and grandchildren - the legitimacy of their grief.

To deny the Holocaust is not only to desecrate the victims and abuse the survivors. It is also to deprive the world of its lessons - lessons which are as crucial today, as they were 60 years ago.

These lessons are crucial today for three urgent reasons:

First, because today, once again, the plague of anti-Semitism is raising its head. Who could have imagined, that less than 60 years after Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, the Jewish people and Israel would be the targets of anti-Semitic attacks, even in the countries that witnessed the Nazi atrocities. Yet this is exactly what is happening. The Holocaust teaches us that while Jews may be the first to suffer from anti-Semitism's destructive hate, they have rarely been the last.

The lessons of the Holocaust are crucial today for a second reason: because today once again we are witnessing, against Jews and other minorities, that same process of delegitimization and dehumanization, that paved the way to destruction. Let us not forget. The brutal extermination of a people, began, not with guns or tanks, but with words, systematically portraying the Jew - the other - as less than legitimate, less than human. Let us not forget this, when we find current newspapers and schoolbooks borrowing caricatures and themes from the Nazi paper *Der Sturmer*, to portray Jews and Israelis.

And finally these lessons are crucial today, because once again, we are witnessing a violent assault on the fundamental principle of the sanctity of human life. Perhaps the greatest single idea that the Bible has given to humanity, is the simple truth that every man, woman and child, is created in the divine image, and so, is of infinite value. For the Nazis, the value of a man was finite, even pitiful. How much work could he do? How much hair did she have? How many gold teeth? For the Nazis, the destruction of one human being, or of a hundred, a thousand, six million, was of no consequence. It was just a means to an evil end.

Today, again, we are pitted against the forces of evil, those for whom human life - whether the civilians they target, or their own youth who they use as weapons - are of no value, nothing but a means to their goals. Our sages teach us that "He who takes a single life, it is as if he has taken an entire world". No human life is less than a world. No ideology, no political agenda, can justify or excuse the deliberate taking of an innocent life.

Mr. President,

For six million Jews, the State of Israel came too late. For them, and for countless others, the United Nations also came too late.

But it is not too late, to renew our commitment, to the purposes for which the United Nations was founded. And it is not too late, to work for an international community that will reflect these values fully; that will be uncompromising in combating intolerance against people of all faiths and ethnicities; that will reject moral equivalence; that will call evil by its name.

We will never know whether, if the United Nations had existed then, the Holocaust could have been prevented. But this Special Session today confirms the need for the United Nations, as well as each individual member state, to rededicate ourselves to ensuring that it will never happen again. In this context, I wish to commend the Secretary General for his moral voice and leadership in bringing this Special Session to fruition, and my colleague Foreign Ministers, for their presence here today.

As the number of survivors shrinks all the time, we are on the brink of that moment, when this terrible event will change - from memory, to history. Let all of us gathered here pledge, never to forget the victims, never to abandon the survivors, and never to allow such an event ever to be repeated.

As the Foreign Minister of Israel, the sovereign state of the Jewish people, I stand before you, to swear, in the name of the victims, the survivors, and all the Jewish people: Never again.

Thank you.