

Dear Commemorators, your Excellences, dear Foreign Guests,

Allow me to welcome our dear survivors and also let me welcome you, here, within the walls of Europe's largest synagogue, on the 24th day of the month of Adar according to the synagogue calendar, to remember together what happened 80 years ago. Let us remember Adar 24, 5704, when the final, bloodiest, and most horrific chapter of the Holocaust began with the Nazi occupation of Hungary. On this day, which was according to the civil calendar, Sunday, March 19, 1944, with the German units Gestapo also arrived. Along with them came the hundred or so men strong Eichmann commando, with the task to annihilate, together with the state apparatus led by governor Miklós Horthy, the more than eight hundred thousand Hungarian Jews.

We came together for the opening event of the 80th anniversary of the Holocaust in Hungary, but I admit that there is a little inaccuracy in this. The Holocaust in Hungary did not begin in 1944 or with the Nazi occupation. On March 19, 1944, my father had been suffering in the forced labor service already for a long time in the Úrkút manganese mine for a long time, together with hundreds of his fellow Jews. Thousands more labored in the Bor copper mine in Serbia and elsewhere in inhumane conditions, while tens of thousands of even more unfortunate ones were driven to the Eastern Front and have been perishing for already three years without weapons, proper equipment and clothing.

All of this was a consequence of anti-Semitism, incited also by the state, the culmination of a process during which Jewish citizens, or citizens considered Jewish according to the law, were gradually deprived of their rights, job opportunities, property, free movement, or even the opportunity to keep in touch with their family members.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There are things that can be forgiven, amended, and even forgotten, but what happened to us during the Shoah can neither be forgiven nor made right, and especially cannot be forgotten.

The horrors of the Holocaust are indescribable. The massacre of half a million Hungarian Jewish martyrs and the desperate efforts of hundreds of thousands more to start something new on the wreckage of their previous lives with the passing of the events involved so much unfathomable individual suffering, so much tragedy that it cannot be visualized. We could go on endlessly listing the horrors, the brutality, the misery of the unfortunates crowded into the ghettos, the torture of the community leaders and the better-off, the body cavity searches, the despair of those driven into boxcars with a bucket of water for the journey, the ramp and the selection upon the arrival, the young mother's horror when her young child was passed on to the grandmother and taken directly to the gas chamber.

We, who were not yet born then, we have the duty even after several generations to recall what happened, to put into words the pain of all those who suffered the atrocities. The pain of those into whose arms and souls the numbers of humiliation stayed engraved forever.

I am asking you that when we remember the martyrs, regardless how terrible their destiny was, let us try to remember their lives, not their destruction, not their death. Let us think of our ancestors, relatives, friends of our family, all members of our community as they were in their lives, loving parents and children, people who struggled with the problems of everyday life, enjoyed the holidays and were

useful members of their community, just as the entire Jewish community was also a useful part of our society, and gave so much to the country.

Please, remember them when you think of the faithful who once filled the hundreds of synagogues in Hungary, and not that there is barely a community left in rural Hungary who could say a prayer for the victims, and out of the hundreds of synagogues, only a few remained, the rest were transformed, or their bricks were scavenged by greedy hands.

Remember them when you think of the man who sat here 80 years ago, on this very bench where you are now, think of his life and not that he might be buried thirty meters away in the garden of the synagogue, in a mass grave.

Let us remember this, and let us also remember with gratitude the few rescuers, who were able to remain humane even in the sea of hatred and indifference and tried to help their fellow Jews.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is a sobering quote from Holocaust survivor, Nobel prize awarded Elie Wiesel from Máramaros that underscores the importance of the remembrance. He said: "If we forget, the dead will be killed a second time," We must not let the Holocaust, or any other heinous act committed against our people, escape our consciousness.

Remembrance is about the past, but it speaks to the present and shapes the future. We must do everything we can to ensure that each new generation faces the heritage of the past clearly and recognizes its significance in the present. It is especially important to keep this in mind because the social processing of the whole tragedy of the Shoah in Hungary, just like in most of the affected countries, is still pending. As long as the majority of society not only knows, but also feels that the Holocaust is not only a tragedy of the Jews, but of the entire nation, it remains our task to remember what happened, to remember the martyrs and whenever necessary, to name the perpetrators.

This is especially important now, when the entire post-war world order seems to be collapsing, when wars unimaginable until a short time ago are raging and when anti-Semitism have soared in many parts of the world to heights that we have not seen in the last eighty years. When the brutal slaughter, defilement, and hostage-taking of civilians, kibbutzniks, the peaceful audience of a music festival, including babies, women, and the elderly on October 7th is accompanied by blaming the victims, when even in the wake of this flagrant crime against humanity, many question the right of the State of Israel for self-defense.

After all this time, after 80 years, we thought it was enough to remember again and again our martyrs murdered in the Holocaust, to retell again and again what happened. We were wrong. This is not enough now! Now, when our enemies warned us with the mass slaughter on October 7th and proved that the goal is to destroy the Jews again, it is not enough to just talk, just remember. We must confront the world with the fact that the era of inhuman acts is knocking here again. We are the target again! The terrorists encourage people to destroy Israel, to destroy the homeland that was finally regained at the cost of six million victims.

They succeeded in inciting mass hysteria against the Jews once more, with a war provoked at the cost of the mass murder of innocent Jews. And hundreds of thousands of the people of the civilized world

embrace this, wave the flags under which the terrorists threaten not only the Jews, but the entire modern civilization.

Today we commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Holocaust in Hungary, but we cannot talk about what happened in the past tense as long as the resurrected specter of anti-Semitism circulates among us. We will defeat it. We will not walk away with our heads down.

Ladies and gentlemen!

It is a consolation for us that Hungary now stands by Israel and its people in an exemplary manner, acts in an exemplary manner against anti-Semitism and enables us to live our Jewish identity in peace here in this country.

British historian Ian Kershaw once said: "The road to Auschwitz was built by hate, but paved with indifference." I would like us not to let indifference pave any road. Let's do everything we can to fight indifference, hatred or exclusion, wherever it happens in the world!

It is important to remember the victims, it is important to work and fight for a world where such atrocities can never happen again. Let the commemorative year be the driving force of an active, proud and strong Jewish community in memory of the martyrs! And let the commemorative year also be a year of construction, so that we can meet the new challenges strengthened in spirit, soul and institutions.

Thank you for coming and joining our commemoration, thank you for listening.