

Speech by the Taoiseach, Mr. Brian Cowen, T.D, on National Holocaust Memorial Day 2010, The Mansion House, Dublin 2, Sunday, 31 January, 2010

A dhaoine Uaisle go léir.

Táimid bailithe inniu chun an ré is dorcha i stair na hEorpa a chomóradh. Meastar gur chailleadh trí ceathrú den daonra Ghiúdach san Eoraip san Uileloscadh. Tá na Naitsithe agus a gcomhoibrithe ciontach as na mílte íospartach eile a mharú freisin.

Tugann an Searmanas seo onóir do chuimhneamh na ndaoine uilig a rinneadh géarleanúint orthu sa tréimhse uafásach sin. Cuireann sé i gcuimhne dúinn don athuair contúirt an chiníochais agus an idirdhéalaithe agus cuireann sé i gcuimhne dúinn freisin ceachtanna tábhachtacha ón am atá thart atá ábhartha sa saol inniu.

Tá Lá Cuimhneacháin an Uileloiscthe eagraithe ag Iontaobhas Oideachais Uileloiscthe na hÉireann i gcaidreamh le hOifig an Aire d'Imeachta agus Comhairle Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath. Ba mhaith liom ómós a thabhairt don Iontaobhas as an obair a dhéanann siad chun feasacht a spreagadh faoin Uileloscadh in Éirinn.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a signatory to the Stockholm Declaration, the Irish Government shares a commitment, along with our European partners and the wider international community, to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and to honour those who took a stand against evil.

We come together this evening to recall one of the darkest periods of European history.

We recall in particular the horrors revealed at the extermination camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau 65 years ago, when the camp was liberated by the Soviet army on 27 January 1945.

It is estimated that two thirds of European Jews perished in the Holocaust. Millions of other victims were murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators.

This ceremony seeks to cherish the memory of all of those who were persecuted because of their nationality, ethnicity, disability, religious belief, political affiliations or their sexual orientation. It serves as a reminder of the dangers of racism and discrimination and provides lessons from the past that are relevant today. We remember so that future generations will never ignore history and, in turn, repeat its mistakes.

The Holocaust has left an indelible blemish on the landscape of history. We in Ireland are very conscious of the need to learn the lessons. The Irish Government is actively committed to promoting an inclusive society and to eliminating all forms of racial intolerance in our country.

The launch of the National Action Plan against racism in 2005 reaffirmed the Government's conviction that racism can have no place in Irish society. Subsequently, we developed a national integration policy and appointed a Minister of State to implement the policy. The Office of the Minister for Integration is working successfully with many sectors of society, including the Garda Síochána, Local Authorities and community groups, to progress integration and a positive engagement with diversity.

As a member of the European Union, Ireland shares a commitment with our European partners to value and uphold human dignity, freedom, democracy and equality. The ratification of the Lisbon Treaty has given legal status to the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which reflects the Union's values and underpins the rights of individuals across the Union. It sets out in clear terms the rights enjoyed by all citizens of the Union. The Treaty has also allowed the Union to accede to the European Convention on Human Rights, which is an important additional human rights protection for the citizens of Europe.

The Irish Government is also fully committed to complying with our international obligations in the area of discrimination and anti-racism. We have ratified the main international treaties that impact on discrimination and we prepare periodic reports outlining the measures we are undertaking in these areas.

As a mark of the Irish Government's continued commitment to Holocaust Remembrance, Ireland became a liaison country of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research in 2009 and is now working towards full membership. We look forward to playing a full part in it.

Tackling racism and promoting diversity is, of course, not just the responsibility of Government. Everybody in Irish society, including individuals, organisations, businesses, Governmental and non-Governmental Organisations, has a role to play.

I would like to take the opportunity this evening to acknowledge the excellent work being done by the Holocaust Educational Trust of Ireland.

I would particularly like to commend the Crocus Project, which encourages national school children to plant yellow crocus bulbs in memory of the 1.5 million Jewish children and thousands of other children who died in the Holocaust.

Over 400 Irish schools participated in this initiative last autumn and some 25,000 bulbs were planted. As spring approaches, our children can watch the flowers grow, reflect on the past and commit to a future of tolerance and respect.

We are fortunate in having a number of Holocaust survivors amongst us this evening. We are very grateful to them for bringing their personal experiences to our schools and to the wider community. They have been making a most important contribution to shaping a better future for us all, by raising awareness of the Holocaust and the evils of antisemitism and other forms of racism and intolerance. They are a testament to the resilience, courage and generosity of the human spirit.

This evening is an opportunity to salute the passing earlier this month of Miep Gies. This was the unassuming, courageous woman who stood by the Frank family during their two years in hiding - in fear of their lives - in Amsterdam and who saved Anne Frank's diary for posterity - although, as she herself said, she would rather that Anne Frank and her family had survived instead. It is also an opportunity to remember Helen Lewis, who survived Auschwitz to become the first teacher of modern dance in Northern Ireland and who also died earlier this month. The story of the Holocaust is often told in numbers but we should never forget that there were real faces behind the numbers - real people.

And we should never forget either that there were real people carrying on the gruesome work of exterminating other human beings. Or that, today, in spite of all that we know, in spite of all the horror, there are people who share the same murderous, hate-filled mindset. We can never turn our back on the Holocaust, if for no other reason than that the evil behind it lives on. As we in Ireland know from the Troubles, hatred of the "other" is never very far from the surface in any country.

In conclusion, I would like to thank everyone participating in today's commemoration. I know that many people have travelled from all over Ireland and abroad to be present here this evening. I would also like to thank all those involved in organising the event. I am privileged to be involved in this important and moving ceremony.

Thank you