GREETINGS FROM THE MINISTER

Canadian Diversity Magazine's Holocaust education & genocide awareness issue, to be distributed at the ITF's Oslo plenary session in June.

As Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, I would like to extend my greetings to readers and offer my congratulations to the Association of Canadian Studies for dedicating this issue of Canadian Diversity to the examination of Holocaust education and genocide awareness.

Our Government takes Holocaust education and the fight against anti-Semitism very seriously. That is why we have dedicated ourselves to becoming full members in the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. That is also why, when the Association of Canadian Studies approached us to support their special issue, we immediately saw the value of this publication in the work to raise awareness and happily agreed to lend Citizenship and Immigration Canada's support.

This was also underlined by our recent refusal to participate in the Durban Review Conference; taking part in discussions that are underpinned by hateful ideas serves only to validate them. This would do a serious injustice to the memory of the victims of genocide and diminish the lessons we hope to learn about preventing such atrocities. Those lessons are taken seriously by some, as evidenced by the refusal of many nations to participate in the Durban Review Conference.

It is vitally important to recognize that genocide is not just a crime of the distant past. Crimes against humanity perpetrated by Pol Pot or Saddam Hussein or Mengistu, the crimes committed in Rwanda or Liberia or East Timor – these crimes occurred at a time when the world should have recognized genocide and acted with determination to put an end to the atrocities. It is through a renewed commitment to awareness and education that we will be able to stop future acts of genocide.

Earlier this month, in partnership with the American and French governments, we hosted an international conference that brought together educators, academics and officials to discuss Canada's regrettable actions during World War II, such as our refugee policy, our policy on the Berlin Olympics, internment of British Jewish refugees in Canada and the M.S. St. Louis incident.

When I think about the importance of Holocaust education and genocide awareness, I will forever remember two recent visits overseas. Last November, I paid my respects at the Babi Yar Holocaust site in Kiev, a ravine where more than 33,000 Ukrainian Jews were killed over two days in 1941 by Nazi war criminals.

A few days after I visited Babi Yar site, an attack in Mumbai, India left 164 people dead, including Rabbi Gavriel Holzberg and his wife Rivkah at Chabad House. I visited Chabad House, the synagogue and Jewish community centre, in January, and was sickened to think that this peaceful place could be targeted in this manner.

Sixty-eight years and thousands of miles separate the ravine of Babi Yar from the debris of the Chabad House, but those two sites are connected by the same hatred, the same dehumanization of innocent people. As Prime Minister Stephen Harper stated in response to the attack on the Chabad House, anti-Semitism "is a pernicious evil that must be exposed, that must be confronted, that must be repudiated whenever and wherever it appears."

Increasing public awareness of genocide and developing more learning opportunities about the Holocaust will expose, confront and repudiate all forms of racial hatred. Our Government is committed to doing just that.



The Honourable / L'honorable
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