

Holocaust Memorial and Genocide Awareness

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United Peace Federation – UK



A meeting held at the House of Commons on Tuesday 4th February, 2014 for the Holocaust Commemoration and Genocide Awareness. The meeting was hosted by Mr. Virendra Sharma MP and chaired by Robin Marsh. Speakers included Rev. Dr. Marcus Braybrooke, Ruth Barnett, Desmond Fernandes, Paramjit Singh Kohli and Edwin Shuker. UN covenants signed in 1948 between nations obliged all nations to try to prevent genocides such as the Holocaust re-occurring and to bring perpetrators of genocide to justice.

Ruth Barnett, a Kinder Transport child from Nazi Germany, has been teaching about the holocaust around schools and community groups challenging people to think. She believes the human race is going in the wrong direction with ignorance and prejudice about racism etc. One cannot help the ethnic group into which one is born. All human beings should be treated as equal. The problem begins with one group thinking it is superior, therefore the other becomes inferior. The problem with the Nazis was they believed they were a superior master race. Jews and Gypsies had poisoned blood!

The Holocaust Memorial Trust is encouraging other genocides to be acknowledged, such as the Armenian and Bosnian. Unless we learn from genocides, Genocide and Holocaust Mtg Photoit will continue. Gregory Stanton identified eight stages of a genocide. There are six stages before killing begins. The final eighth stage of denial suggests that if genocide is not recognised and analysed, it will happen again. There is a process of denial. She expressed the plight of the Roma- not to be called gypsies- in many countries as travellers and wanderers. They were badly treated as in Dale farm two years ago which was taken over by the Council. Though it is their land, they are not able to get planning permission and have been evicted with nowhere to stay.



Rev. Marcus Braybrooke reminded us of the sessions on the dynamics of reconciliation. He remembered those whose loved ones had died. Danger of not treating other persons as human beings. He mentioned Theresienstadt concentration camp which the Red Cross claimed to have visited. Their message not to lose faith and hope. The danger of labelling and referring in degrading terms to people such as, 'You are a waste of space'. How one refers to people matters, particularly the unfortunate immigrants or those on benefits being jeered at. Demonising 'terrorists' for example. Christians share responsibility for centuries of anti-Jewish teaching. Gerard Priestly talks of the dramatic improvement since the Catholic Vatican II document 'Nostra Aetate'. The Jewish people are not to be blamed for death of Christ. Hitler had attended Oberammegau.

He said that these prejudices needed 'weeding' but they rebounded as strong as ever. He discussed who was really to blame for Jesus' death: Was it the Romans, Pontius Pilate? Did the High Priest Caiaphas have little room to manoeuvre? Dr. Kamel Hussein said that 'Jerusalem was a city for all humankind'. He also talked of prejudices in certain countries against religious groups, such as the Bah'ai and the Jews. After the Holocaust, and the general condition of human beings in a 'world of darkness', do we see the divine in every human face?

Edwin Shuker is the Vice President of the Jewish European Congress and the World Sephardic Congress. He said that the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, a German, admitted that he would take the legacy of the violence of the Nazis to his grave. He prayed for peace in the future. He himself was a refugee from Iraq and was bereft of everything even his school card which had surprisingly turned up in an exhibition in Washington DC. He had to rebuild his life. He ended with a declaration that we had a mission for all humanity: 'Never again'.

Paramjit Singh Kohli reminded us of the disaster of Amritsar in 1984. The UK involvement in that tragic event had come to light under the '30 year rule' to let out previously secret UK documents. He stated that Margaret Thatcher had given support to Gandhi's government. There was a riot squad in operation in Delhi and those who participated were promoted by the Indian government. He called for an inquiry. He referred to Armenian persecutions in which 1 million people died and the problems in Tibet where three generations had suffered restricted rights of freedom of religion and had been confined in labour camps.

Charlotte Simon, who is originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), talked of the genocide in the eastern region of her country with President Kagame of Rwanda and others plundering the wealth of Congo's minerals etc. 'If we do not stand up for change, we are accomplices.' she said. She said more than six million Congolese had been killed in the eastern DRC since 1996 by neighbouring nations or their proxies, in an effort to control the abundant natural resources.

Others mentioned the other countries who are suffering community violence, e.g. Pakistan, Cambodia, Northern Cyprus- Makarios and the Sikhs. Not all had a say because of the lack of time so refugees from other countries did not have a chance to mention the problems they had endured.

The meeting was closed early at 7.30 pm because of the rail strike.

Views expressed here are not necessarily held by UPF as an organisation.