

73rd International liberation commemoration

Stanley (Zoltan) Bernath (survivor, USA)

My name is Stanley Bernath. I was born Zoltan Bernath in Carei Romania.

I grew up in Oradea Romania until 18 years old when the Nazi's came in and I was deported to Auschwitz on June 2, 1944. June 8, 1944 I was transferred to Mauthausen Concentration Camp and soon transferred to Ebensee sub camp.

I remember digging in the tunnels. I remember standing in line for roll call towards the end of the war when the commander ordered us to go into the tunnel to safety from the approaching allies. I don't remember who started to say "no", but we all said "no" in German, going down the line. They could have shot us but they didn't.

We were liberated on May 6, 1945 by the Americans, Patton's 3rd Army. I was 19 years old. I was 65 pounds and almost dead. I was in a hospital and as soon as I could, I left to go back to Romania to find my family.

Within a year, I immigrated to the United States and shortly joined the American Army to repay them for taking me in. I became a citizen of the United States in 1952, married my wife Arlene and had twin daughters.

I have a very good life now. I never forget what happened during the war and now talk to school groups, churches, and synagogues for the past 40 years so no one should forget.

Dr. Matteo Biffoni (mayor of Prato)

The 30th anniversary of the partnership between Prato and Ebensee is a momentous jubilee. The partnership is a covenant, a connection. The word "partnership" is weak related to the strength and importance of this connection. I mean that in a cultural manner as well as in focus to the connection itself: two cities which found together after dramatic moments in European history, are now related in name of peace, democracy and freedom.

It is our responsibility to continue to project of these brave men who put in all their strength and authority to bring these two cities together thirty years ago, as a sign of remembrance.

Our communities dealt seriously with their history which was dominated by death and persecution. Thanks to the tragic victims from that time and the will never to forget what happened 73 years ago, we personally were not confronted with such acts of violence.

Now it is one of our big challenges to support the act of remembrance with all our strength and power. We must not allow that those people who did not learn from our history are responsible for our fundamental values. We have to identify the real importance of our partnership and get this importance across to our descendants. Who decides for himself to stand on the correct side, on the side of freedom, peace and democracy, has to take care for the values of remembrance to defeat the icy winds which want to take us back to the darkest hours of our history.

Because what we all want is a Europe in freedom and peace, which never forgets.

Dr.ⁱⁿ Susanne Scholl (Austrian journalist and authoress)

Ladys and gentelmen,

it is a great honour for me to address this speech today. And it was a great need to me.

I have got two personal connections with this place here in Ebensee.

Firstly, when I was young, me and my family spent many summers here. My parents had an apartment in Altmünster. This is only half an hour distance from here and we visited the concentration camp memorial nearly every summer.

This is involved in my personal history. I am Jewish. My parents survived, because they could escape at the right time to the UK. All my grandparents were killed by the Nazis in Maly Trostinec near Minsk and in Auschwitz.

I not only inherited the trauma of persecution. I inherited the obligation never to forget, how one human can harm another one. Never to forget the importance of remembering. Because who forgets, repeats!

We live in a time of disturbance, insecurity, despondency, discontent. In a time, were a new generation of politicians made oblivion to their type of politics, because they do not want to remember. Because remembering would force them to see the world from a different angle.

That is why I – and fortunately also many more – cannot rest. It forces us, to fulfil our duty set up by the history of our families but also by the history of all humans. We must not look away.

We must not look away, when humans are categorized once again. We must not look away, when some people deny the human dignity of others. In this country and in several other European countries this is happening at the moment.

We found a new bogeyman – the Muslim. We blame those enemies for everything bad what happens in the world. Like we Jewish people once were blamed for the misery of the world, now the Muslim people must bear the blame. But it has to be remarked that also Jewish people nowadays must absorb hate and jealousy, lack of respect and perfidy.

We are standing at a place of horror.

At a place, were things happened which never should have happened, and which must not happen again.

My parents educated me in the awareness that there is nothing worse in the world than denying the human dignity of people. They forced me to stand up against every injustice in the world.

The people of my generation are old now. We take the place of those people who witnessed with their own eyes, what hate and perfidy can cause in human beings. What it means when people deny the human dignity of others.

We have to take responsibility from the first generation of contemporary witnesses and ensure that remembrance will survive. Because when I hear the politicians talking about the people who came in there need to our door, they sound like the politicians from former times. They sound like those people who abused my mother as a "Saujüdin" when they were forcing her through the streets of Vienna. They sound like the Belgian official who threatened my grandfather to send him back to Nazi Germany.

We, who are standing here to remember those people who were tortured and killed in this camp, must not allow that something can happen again what should never happen again. We all have the duty to be alert and say out loud what is wrong. We have the chance to be courageous. We are not in danger yet. And we have to use this situation.

I thank you for your kind attention and I bow in deep respect to the dead, who we are remembering today. With this kind of respect, that is my request to you, we should also meet the living. All the living people.

Dr.ⁱⁿ Camilla Brunelli (ANED Italia)

Ladys and gentlemen!

It is a great honor for me to speak to you at this place, a place which was during the war a site of horror.. This belongs to the past, because for many decades people from many parts of the world come here: Concentration camp survivors, members of the families of the victims, representatives of the local authorities, politicians at national level, intellectuals and artists, younger and older citizens who gathered to remember and to think.

I speak as a member of the National Assembly of ANED, the association of former concentration camp prisoners of Italy and bring the greetings of our chairperson Dario Venegoni and from Giancarlo Biagini, president of the ANED of Prato. Since some years ANED also admits members who are not concerned directly by the deportation but who have decided to keep up the recollection of the deportation of the Italians and female Italians in NS concentration- and destruction camps. , They are called „friends of the ANED“. I tried to do the same in ANED in my work as a leader of "Museo della Deportazione" of Prato.

What is it about, if we speak of deportation from Italy? Maybe it would be good to have a closer look at the topic: It began after the break of the alliance between fascistic Italy and Hitler, after the armistice from the 8th of September, 1943 with the allied forces. A few days later the so-called fascistic Salò republic which worked together with the Nazis in the last awful phase of the destruction of the towns and whole populations of Europe was established. With the announcement of the signing of the armistice, Nazi Germany changed from a friend into an occupying power.

From that moment the Italian Jews – who had remained spared as a citizen of an allied state of the deportation in concentration camp and destruction camp – became the victim of the national-socialist destruction politics. Approx. 7000 Italian Jews and from Jews from other countries who had fled to Italy before, were arrested by the National Socialists and the Italian fascists collaborators and were interned in Auschwitz. The majority of them was sent immediately after the arrival to the gas chambers. Another part, namely that who was classified as operable was divided to the "slave work". When the Italian Jews came to the camps by the end of 1943, this was a part in the history of the SS-camp system when not the large part of all arrested Jews was murdered any longer because the Nazis needed the Jewish working power for their war industry. Nevertheless, the work under concentration camp terms was not a survival guarantee. From the Italian deported Jews just 12% survived. From the "political" concentration camp prisoners approx. 40% survived.

The majority of the Italian prisoners were political prisoners: here they worked in the tunnel and died of hunger and illnesses and under the blows of the SS and the Capos. What must do we understand as political deportation from Italy? The National Socialists and Italian fascists had different measures against men and women of the opposition. They were imprisoned, immediately shot or deported to SS-controlled concentration camp camps. One of these camps was Ebensee, as a sub camp of Mauthausen.

A total of approx. 24,000 regime opponents were deported from Italy and hundreds of striking workers, among them also 338 deportees from Tuscany, from Florence, Prato and Empoli, who were arrested in connection with the general strike of the first March days of 1944 by the Italian militia of the fascistic Salò republic. Today this often underestimated general strike in Italy is interpreted by historians as a noteworthy and risky unarmed opposition against fascism and German occupation. Among the deportees were also people who were not part of the opposition, for example many mostly young Prateser which fell victim to an arbitrary raid. 133 people from Prato were arrested after the strike and were deported to Mauthausen and the sub camp Ebensee. Still today many of their family member come to our museum to find out the more exact circumstances of the deportation of their fathers or uncles. The historical research which also concerns the destiny of every prisoner comes to no end.

Nevertheless, a commemoration ceremony, like those whom we commit today may not become the easy, always returning rhetoric. It is not only an opportunity to remember of the victims. It obliges us to the inspection of the events and to the reflection about the mechanisms which led to all this. We must also have a look at those people who supported this system: the wide spectrum of accomplices. We know, how much the fascists of the Salò republic contributed to the pursuit by the national-socialist occupying forces. Of course, we also know around help actions and rescue operations and from so many valiant actions which there have been in our country daily.

The best position which we can take nowadays towards wars, the economic exploitation of whole countries followed by the migration movements compared with xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism is remembrance: Without reminding of the crimes of the Nazi era there can be no real consciousness of the risks for present and future. The reminiscent work may come to no end. We should not follow those people who say „Everything has to end sometimes! We already know everything!“ This simply is not true, this subject is often wrong shown by sides of some politicians.

However, we must think about how this reminiscent work could be done.

And at this point I would like to speak with joy and gratitude of a man, Roberto Castellani who died in 2004 who had found more than thirty years ago an extraordinary manner a way to maintain a living recollection. I was present, I can testify it, because I could provide his plans as the young bilingual interpreter who studied history – and I am proud of it. Roberto Castellani, many of us will remember him, very often addressed speeches as a contemporary witness to us. A stone tablet reminds in this cemetery of him.

Roberto had the dream of a town partnership of peace between his town, Prato, and the municipality Ebensee where he was imprisoned. He wanted to set a sign of peace and friendship for the future, especially for the young generation. He always said: We know the past, and it was awful! We must create another future, but how is this possible? The must support the often repeated sentence „never again! “ and try to realize it. This should maintain a constructive dialogue, as well as a knowledge and understanding of the difficult past. But always on the basis of the historical truth.

At the beginning it was not easy, I can testify it: there were in both towns many people who did not agree with this new and courageous method. There was still too much shyness, because it was in the middle of the 80s. At that time the development of a common European reminiscent culture was at its beginning. Today we know this. (Other town partnerships with this background originated in 1997 between Saint Georgen at the Gusen and Empoli, an in 2009 between Mauthausen and Florence.) I remember the tears from daughters of prisoners who died in Ebensee: How much pain on the one hand, how much shyness on the other! But many understood on both sides the extraordinary opportunity which was offered them here: In September, 1987 the partnership pact was signed in Prato what was repeated in May, 1988 in Ebensee. What seemed so difficult came true: May people in both cities did their best to fill the partnership with life, namely in the schools, in the churches, in the museums, in the associations, in the public and in the private sphere. Today the town partnership is thirty years old. Our partnership supported the process to get rid of existing prejudices and of mistrust. It supported an active exchange, several trips of the recollection and the opportunity for many people to get information about the Nazi era. We may not turn back on this way. It is more important than ever! We owe it Roberto ... and our dead people.

And if we look at the results of war, fascism and destruction politics it must lead us to defense the human rights: the right of life, right of freedom, right of peace and to the social justice for everybody. All these rights were designed to protect the untouchable dignity of all people, old people, men, women, children of any origin and religion. The aim for all citizens and for those people who bear political responsibility must be to support these rights. And all these rights are also part of the text of our partnership document! We should hold up the values of „peace in the world and the ideals of brotherliness and solidarity“ and I want to add: Freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

While I listen to myself I have to stop for a moment. How often similar sentences were already said and how often I have already translated them. And how differently does the reality look like? I know, speaking is easier than acting and it may sound like always repeated empty phrases. We must find new words and new actions on the already so positively marked way of our partnership!

Thank you for your attention!

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