



**Speech by The Right Honourable Terry Davis,
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Lessons learned?

Holocaust remembrance and combating anti-Semitism in 2008

10 November, Vienna

Embargo until delivery / check against delivery

When my colleagues and myself were discussing the ways in which the Council of Europe should commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Kristallnacht, one of my colleagues told us a story about his son. Max is nine years old, and he goes to a school close to the Council of Europe headquarters in Strasbourg. It was after his birthday party, when his friends had already left and he was helping his father to clean up the napkins and paper cups. Max paused and said "You know that I am the only French kid in the class who invites foreigners to visit him at home?".

Actually, Max is not French, and most of the boys and girls he described as "foreigners" are, but that is besides the point. For many children growing up in our societies today, not only in France, these are only euphemisms – the real divisions go along the same old lines - skin colour, ethnic origin, religion, social class.

Most of Max's friends who are not welcome to the homes of their school friends come from families originating from Maghreb countries. Some are from the former French colonies in Africa. Many are Muslims.

And when I think about them, I think of Lore Gang-Salheimer. She was Jewish. In 1933 she was 11 years old and was living in Nuremberg. That was when her classmates began crying out to her, "I will not walk home from school with you any more. I must not be seen with you again."

What Max's friends share with Lore is the terrifying, painful and degrading feeling of being ostracised by their peers. They are discriminated against, and it hurts.

It would of course be totally wrong to think that the world has not changed since 1933. There will not be another Kristallnacht, and there will not be another Holocaust. But not because Kristallnacht and the Holocaust could not happen again, but because we cannot, must not and will not let it happen again.

That is why it is so important not only to remember what happened, but also to keep in mind that terror never comes in one fell swoop. As I told the participants of a Council of Europe seminar on teaching remembrance in Nuremberg and Dachau last week, the most violent manifestation of terror is never more than the tip of a horrific iceberg. Behind the terror of the Kristallnacht, behind the brutal violence by

storm troopers in the street, was a still greater terror, one that paralysed the capacity for action, prevented neighbours from reacting, friends from feeling, let alone expressing the slightest concern. A terror that passed a sentence of solitude. First there was isolation. Then came discrimination – and finally came violence.

The point I am trying to make is that if we are determined not to allow history to repeat itself, we should not wait until there is violence. We cannot afford to ignore or minimise discrimination. We must speak out when children are no longer invited to each other's birthdays – because of their ethnic origin, because of their religion, because of their social class.

The Council of Europe was established after the Second World War and as a direct reaction to the horrors of the Second World War. Most of our activities and most of our conventions deal with subjects which are in one way or another related to the lessons learned from the Holocaust.

This is clearly the case with the European Convention on Human Rights. Every article of the Convention was drafted with fresh and painful images of the horror still in mind. This was no theory. The people who drafted the European Convention on Human Rights had a very clear idea of why we needed Article 2 – protecting the right to life, Article 3 – prohibiting torture, Article 4 – prohibiting slavery and forced labour, Article 5 – guaranteeing liberty and security, Article 6 – the right to a fair trial, Article 7 – no punishment without law. The right to respect for private and family life, freedom of thought, freedom of conscience and

freedom of religion, freedom of expression, freedom of association, the right to marry – written in a direct reaction to the Nuremberg Law on the Protection of German Blood and German Honour.

Other activities of the Council of Europe, from legal co-operation to social cohesion, education, cultural heritage and youth reflect the same determination to reinforce Europe's safeguards against intolerance, prejudice and discrimination. We are soon going to launch a new phase of our All Different All Equal Anti-discrimination Campaign with a specific focus on media.

When it comes to education, I should like to mention briefly our project "Teaching remembrance - Education for the prevention of crimes against humanity", which has been running since 2001.

The objective is to help school children to learn about and understand the Shoah as the first deliberate attempt to exterminate a people. They also learn about other crimes against humanity committed in Europe in the 20th century, and they are encouraged to embrace the values of tolerance and understanding between nations, ethnic groups and religious communities.

In 2002, the European Ministers of Education decided to introduce a Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust and for the Prevention of Crimes against Humanity in schools. The dates are freely chosen by each country, in accordance with their specific historic and other circumstances. The Day is not meant to be merely an occasion for

commemorations and ceremonies. The focus is on specific projects in the schools.

In conclusion, I should like to say a few words about the work of one of our bodies whose work is most directly related to the subject of our discussions here today, namely the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance – known by its initials ECRI - works to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and intolerance. It carries out country-by-country monitoring of all manifestations of prejudice and discrimination in Europe today.

In fact, in the last few years, the sharp increase in incidents in some countries and the intensification of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic acts and ideas in many countries has become one of the worrying trends picked up by ECRI in its successive Annual Reports.

Reports of desecrated synagogues and Jewish cemeteries make regular news. Reports of physical attacks on members of the Jewish and Muslim communities and attacks on Jewish and Muslim school children are merely the most visible tip of the iceberg.

Hate speech is increasingly widespread, exploiting modern technology, such as the internet and satellite television.

In addition, some political parties and leaders continue to promote anti-Semitism and Islamophobia openly or in a coded manner.

These manifestations of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are not exclusively the actions of marginal or radical groups. They are often mainstream phenomena, stemming from different social groups and sectors of society.

That is why ECRI elaborated a legal text in June 2004 in order to provide Council of Europe member states with recommendations for the development of comprehensive national policies to fight effectively against anti-Semitism.

ECRI has drawn up some very precise propositions as to how governments should face this outbreak of racism. Propositions which explain not only how to punish and when to punish, but also how to prevent such acts.

For ECRI, the fight against anti-Semitism requires measures which take into account its specificity. But the fight against anti-Semitism cannot be detached from the fight against racism and intolerance, of which it is an intrinsic part.

Recently, a survey published by the US-based Pew Research Center showed that almost half of the population in several European countries have negative opinions about Muslims and Jews.

Two aspects of the findings are particularly important.

First, the increase in intolerance is felt across Europe. When it comes to hatred of people who are different, there is no East-West divide.

The second conclusion may be more surprising. It is that the same people hate both Jews and Muslims. Some people are obsessed with conflicts between religions. However the real conflict is between bigots and the rest of us. Most prejudice is based on plain stupidity, but that is no justification for complacency. All such sentiments are quickly hijacked by extremists on all sides and then exploited in their ideological propaganda and campaigns of terror.

We must all, whatever our religious beliefs, stand together – united in our belief that we are all different, but all equal.