



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on International Holocaust Remembrance Day and the Centennial Marking the Birth of Raoul Wallenberg

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 26, 2012

The United States commemorates International Holocaust Remembrance Day which occurs tomorrow on January 27. The date marks the anniversary of the 1945 liberation of the largest Nazi death camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau where Jews, Roma, Sinti, and others were targeted for extermination by the Nazis. It is difficult to believe that we are only steps away from the place where Hitler proclaimed the Anschluss, and merely 400 kilometers from Auschwitz. As we remember the atrocity of the Holocaust, we must also remember the courage of individuals like Raoul Wallenberg.

We take note of Mr. Wallenberg this year in particular, because it is the centenary of his birth, and we take note of his contributions to humanity. Wallenberg was a Swedish diplomat who served as first secretary at the Swedish Legation in Budapest in the summer of 1944. By that time, almost 400,000 Jewish Hungarians had been put on trains to Auschwitz. Wallenberg understood that he had an obligation to fight the unspeakable evil he observed, and he worked tirelessly, often risking his own life, in order to save thousands of Jews from certain death.

With American and Swiss financing, he established safe houses, hospitals, soup kitchens, and nurseries for Jews throughout Budapest. He issued thousands of Swedish protective passports to the remaining population of Jewish Hungarians to help them escape.

We call attention to his actions because his determination and courage are an object lesson for all of us. On one occasion, Wallenberg climbed on top of a train destined for Auschwitz. He ignored the shouts of German soldiers and the Hungarian Arrow Cross officers, and he slipped protective passports into hands outstretched from unsealed doors.

The Arrow Cross began shooting at Wallenberg, but he continued until he handed out every passport he had. He then ordered those with passports to leave the train and escorted them to Swedish vehicles. On that day in 1944, Raoul Wallenberg saved dozens of lives, and his efforts throughout World War II likely saved over 100,000 Jews. Among those whom he saved was a young teenager named Thomas Lantos, who later became the only Holocaust survivor to serve in the U.S. Congress. In 1981, the United States Congress awarded Wallenberg honorary American citizenship. We strongly support the Government of Sweden's efforts to obtain a full accounting of Wallenberg's fate.

We thank the delegation of Israel for the exhibit 'Visa for Life' and encourage the delegations to join us for its opening in the Hofburg Vorsaal. The exhibit honors diplomats who saved the lives of Jewish people during the Holocaust. We, representatives of today's diplomatic

community, have an obligation to heed the call of the 2000 International Forum on the Holocaust in Stockholm: “Our commitment must be to remember the victims who perished, respect the survivors still with us, and reaffirm humanity’s common aspiration for moral understanding and justice.”

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.