



# ***ISRAEL MATTERS!***

Publication of the Israel Affairs Committee of Temple Beth Shalom  
1809 Whitney Avenue, Hamden, CT 06517-1401



Issue Number 113  
June 2017

## **Israel Seeks to Identify All Jewish Holocaust Victims**

### **Israel to UN: Take action against PA's payments to terrorists**

Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, Danny Danon, recently asked the UN Security Council to "take action" and call on the Palestinian Authority to stop paying terrorists for killing civilians in Israel. "In 2016, the PA dedicated almost \$130 million of its budget to paying imprisoned terrorists," he said. "They spent another \$175 million in allowances to the families of so-called martyrs. Altogether, the PA paid more than \$300 million directly in support of terrorists every single year."

Danon cited the cases of American citizens Taylor Force and Ezra Schwartz, as well as British citizen Hannah Bladon, all killed by Palestinian terrorists in Israel, whom he said were later compensated thousands of dollars for their actions.

"This is all part of an organized system by the PA which glorifies terrorists and encourages terrorism, these payments are mandated by their laws," he said. "Think about the simple message this sends to young Palestinians. Mahmoud Abbas is telling them that there is a simple equation: kill innocent people and you and your family will be paid for the rest of your life."

The ambassador called on the international community to follow their payments to the PA and make sure the funds don't go towards remuneration for terrorists. "It is absurd to condemn terror, while at the same time paying terrorists," he said. "It's time for the UN, the Security Council, and the entire international community to finally tell Abbas that enough is enough." [Jpost.com]

Six million Jews were murdered by the Nazis and their accomplices during World War Two. In many cases, entire towns' Jewish populations were wiped out, with no survivors to bear witness - part of the Nazis' plan for the total annihilation of European Jewry. Since 1954, Israel's Holocaust memorial, Yad Vashem, has been working to recover the names of all the victims, and to date has managed to identify some 4.7 million. "Every name is very important to us," says Dr Alexander Avram, director of Yad Vashem's Hall of Names and the Central Database of Holocaust Victims' Names. "Every new name we can add to our database is a victory against the Nazis, against the intent of the Nazis to wipe out the Jewish people. Every new name is a small victory against oblivion."

The institution, a sprawling complex of buildings, trees, and gardens on the western slopes of Mount Herzl, gathers details about the victims in two ways: through information from those with knowledge of the deceased, and archive sources, ranging from Nazi deportation lists to Jewish school yearbooks. "We're interested in seeing a person as a person and who they were before they became a victim."

It is, the institution says, a kind of paper tombstone. So far Yad Vashem has collected 2.7 million Pages of Testimony. Each is stored in black boxes, each containing 300 pages - 9,000 boxes in all. They are kept in climate-controlled conditions on shelves surrounding a central installation, a 30 foot high conical lined with the faces of men, women, and children who were murdered, rising up towards the sky. In the Hall of Names, groups of visitors pass through in quiet contemplation. There is space on the shelves for 11,000 more boxes - or 6 million names in all.

With the last survivors dying out, Yad Vashem is facing a race against time to prevent more than a million unidentified victims disappearing without a trace. This is apparent in the decreasing number of Pages of Testimony it receives - down from at least 2,000 per month five years ago to about 1,600 per month currently.

The memorial is trying to raise awareness, including among Holocaust survivors who have not yet come forward. For decades, for many of them the experience was still too painful to talk about. "It's quite a common occurrence, not only in Holocaust survivors but survivors of prolonged and extreme trauma in childhood," says Dr Martin Auerbach, Clinical Director at Amcha, a support service in Jerusalem for

(Continued)

(Continued from page 1)

Holocaust survivors.

That began to change, he says, after about 30 or 40 years, when many survivors started talking about what happened, not with their children but with their inquisitive grandchildren. Dr Auerbach sees the Names Recovery Project as a valuable part of the healing process. "Filling out a page of information saying this was my father, mother, grandfather, nephews and nieces - you cannot bury your relatives who perished but you can remember them in a way that will commemorate them forever, so this is very important and also therapeutic for many survivors."

While Yad Vashem has made great strides in identifying victims from Western and Central Europe - about 95% have now been named - far fewer names have been uncovered in Nazi-occupied areas of Eastern Europe, where about 4.5 million Jews were murdered. This is because while there was an organized, official process of arrest and deportation further west, in the east whole communities were marched off and massacred without any such formalities. An estimated 1.5 million Jews alone were shot to death by the Einsatzgruppen (mobile killing squads) in what has become known as the Holocaust by Bullets, after Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. In Babi Yar, in Ukraine, for instance, of the 33,000 Jews from Kiev and its surroundings who were slaughtered in a ravine in September 1941 in the largest massacre of its kind, about half are yet to be identified. Others not murdered by the Einsatzgruppen died, without a trace, from starvation or exhaustion in ghettos and labor camps, or were killed in nearby extermination camps, where they had been herded without any kind of processing.

Yad Vashem is working with Jewish organizations in those countries to try to reach remaining survivors in the former Soviet Union, where the Holocaust was not officially commemorated, and who may have little awareness of the memorial's existence. It is a massive and often complex task. The memorial holds some 205 million Holocaust-related documents, which are examined meticulously in the search for names.

"There is a lot of documentation where there are names that are very scattered," says Dr Avram. "Names mentioned in a letter here or a report there. This can be very labor intensive. Sometimes you have to go through thousands and thousands of pages just to retrieve a few dozen names." The difficulty is compounded by the fact that sources can be in 30-40 different languages, most are handwritten and can be in different scripts, such as Latin, Hebrew, and Cyrillic. "Our staff not only need to be linguists but they need to know calligraphy," says Dr Avram, himself a language expert.

One of the biggest gaps is with children, of whom some 1.5 million were murdered in the Holocaust. Only about half

have been identified. "It's one of the saddest things," says Dr Avram. "We have reports where parents are named with say three or four children, unnamed. They were little children and people just don't remember." The aim is to turn them from anonymous statistics into human beings again, like seven year old Edward-Edik Tonkonogi, from Satanov in Ukraine. Edik was murdered after the Nazis entered the town that same year. His name was later memorialized in a Page of Testimony by a relative.

As time moves on, the task of finding missing names is getting harder in some respects but easier in others. The availability of source material is greater than ever and advances in technology mean it can be a less arduous task to gather information and manipulate the data. However, the fewer the names left to uncover, the more activity it takes to find them. The digital age also means there are more tools at researchers' disposal than ever before. The department searching for names recently took to social media, including Facebook, in a push to reach untapped survivors. The campaign generated many new Pages of Testimony. "When you're talking about social media you have the younger generation now understanding that those names are not in our database and trying to find out the information from their family members," says Sara Berkowitz, manager of the Names Recovery Project.

There is another significant, sometimes life-changing, outcome of the growth of the names database, which has been available online since 2004. It has led to emotional reunions of survivors who had lived their lives not knowing there was anyone else from their family left alive. Last year, two sets of families belonging to two sisters, each of whom thought the other had perished in the Holocaust, were united after a chance discovery through the Pages of Testimony. It transpired the sisters had lived out their lives just 25 minutes away from each other in northern Israel, but passed away without ever being aware.

The project has also brought to light other, unfortunate findings. Argentinean-born Claudia de Levie, whose parents fled Germany in the 1930s, believed she had lost four or five relatives in the Holocaust. A search of the database to help with her daughter's homework revealed 180 family members had been killed.

Despite the millions of names recorded so far, there is still a long way to go if all six million are ever to be recovered, but those behind the project remain determined. "I personally would like that we do reach that goal, that at least among those who perished there won't be a person who remains unknown. It's our moral imperative," says Sara Berkowitz. "Until I sit in the office and days will pass by and I won't have work to do, I'll know that we've more or less raked the universe to try to get to every name and there is no more there." [BBC.com]

[Article edited due to space limitations. Full article is at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-39062221> ]