

## **Miscellaneous**

---

### **FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIBERATION OF AUSCHWITZ CONCENTRATION CAMP**

The fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz concentration camp was held on 26-27 January 1995. Attending the ceremonies at Krakow and Auschwitz were several hundred survivors of the camp, representatives of associations of former deportees, 19 heads of State and numerous distinguished guests, including Mr Elie Wiesel and Mrs Simone Veil.

Invited in its capacity as Nobel Peace Prize laureate, the ICRC was represented at these ceremonies by its President, Mr Cornelio Sommaruga; Mrs Liselotte Kraus-Gurny, a member of the Committee; Mr Charles Biedermann, Director of the International Tracing Service; Mr François Bugnion, Deputy Director for Principles, Law and Relations with the Movement, and Ms Ewa Tuszynski, interpreter.

On 26 January, Mr Biedermann and Mr Bugnion attended a formal meeting of the Senate of the Jagiellonian University of Krakow, which marked the opening of the ceremonies. First was an address by the rector of the University on the subject of academic responsibility in seeking truth and fostering tolerance. Afterwards, the President of Poland, Mr Lech Walesa, and other dignitaries spoke on various topics, with particular emphasis on the vital importance of respect for one's fellow human beings, tolerance, and the importance of preserving the memory of the Holocaust while avoiding any revisionist changes.

That afternoon, Mr Sommaruga and Mrs Kraus-Gurny attended a meeting of delegation leaders, including several heads of State, convened by Mr Walesa to approve the text of an appeal for peace and tolerance that was to be made the following day at Auschwitz-Birkenau. During the meeting, which was held at Wawell, the Krakow Royal Palace, the ICRC President pointed out that the ICRC was taking part in these ceremonies to pay tribute to the memory of all victims, and to express its admiration of and solidarity with the survivors of Auschwitz. "I say it with humility, aware of the possible omissions and mistakes of the Red Cross in the past," he added. Mr Sommaruga also called for the development of a society based on tolerance and solidarity.

On Friday 27 January, commemorative ceremonies were held at Auschwitz-Birkenau in the presence of many distinguished guests, including 19 European heads of State, representatives of Jewish organizations and associations of former victims of persecution, as well as several hundred former deportees.

Participants first went to Auschwitz I, where they passed through a gate above which the words *Arbeit macht frei* ["Work makes you free"] were written in iron letters. A wreath was placed between Blocks 10 and 11, in front of the wall where the executions took place.

The main ceremonies were held in front of the Monument of Nations at Auschwitz-Birkenau, at the end of the railway where trains carrying deportees stopped.

Prayers were offered in keeping with Jewish, Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed and Islamic tradition, followed by an address by Baron Goldstein, President of the International Auschwitz Committee. Testimonies were then given by Mr S. Ryniak, a former deportee (registered under No. 31, he was the oldest surviving deportee), Mr S. Weiss, Speaker of the Knesset of the State of Israel, Mr Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and Mr Walesa. The predominant note sounded by these speakers was an appeal for tolerance.

Wreaths bearing the colours of each of the 31 countries whose citizens had been exterminated at Auschwitz were then placed at the site.

At the end of the ceremonies, thousands of candles were lit and placed along the railway as a tribute to the countless victims of Nazi persecution.

\* \* \*

Auschwitz symbolizes the most heinous crime ever committed in the history of mankind. For the Jewish people, it was an unprecedented tragedy, the extreme expression of the Hitler regime's attempt to annihilate them through genocide. For over one million men, women and children, it marked the final phase of an unspeakable ordeal. Of the victims, 90 per cent were Jews; the others were Romanians, Soviet prisoners of war, and members of the Resistance, the Polish intelligentsia and the clergy. There were a mere 7,500 survivors.

Auschwitz also represents the greatest failure in the history of the ICRC, aggravated by its lack of decisiveness in taking steps to aid the victims of persecution.

By its presence at these ceremonies, the ICRC wished to show its awareness of the terrible wounds inflicted, and of the need to keep the memory of these events alive in order to protect victims from a second death — that of being forgotten.

---