

**Holocaust Memorial Ceremony marking
the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust**

United Nations Headquarters, New York

Friday, 27 January 2023

Remarks by Jacques Grishaver

My name is Jacques Grishaver. I was born in Amsterdam on March twentieth, nineteen-forty-two. I am Jewish. Because of that simple fact, my grandfather Isaïc had to go into hiding with me. I was barely one year old. Most members of my family were murdered in Auschwitz and Sobibor.

When the Nazis and fascists came to power and the first measures against the Jews were announced, many thought that things would probably be okay. And as the deportations gradually began, rumours started circulating about what was happening in those dark German camps, far away to the east. But it couldn't be true, could it? That the Nazis intended to destroy the entire Jewish people was beyond human imagination.

Because it was so unimaginable, many of the one-hundred-and-forty-thousand Dutch Jews complied with the Germans' order to wear a yellow star, and eventually also followed the order to report for transport to Kamp Westerbork. From there, trains left weekly for Auschwitz and Sobibor. Jews were hunted in the streets. Many went into hiding, finding refuge with brave Dutch families, but just as many were betrayed.

Only a few thousand Dutch Jews returned from the camps. After the liberation, a mere thirty-two-thousand of a once vibrant Jewish community were still alive. In relative terms, the Netherlands had the highest murder rate in Western Europe.

While I was in hiding with my grandfather, my other grandparents, together with my parents and two aunts, were locked up in the "Joodse Schouwburg", the Jewish Theatre, where the Amsterdam Jews were rounded up, as a stopover on their way to death.

The Jewish resistance fighter Jacques van der Kar, a friend of my imprisoned grandparents, offered to smuggle them out of the theatre building, but instead of choosing to save himself, my grandfather said "get my daughter and son-in-law out because they have a little baby". That little baby was me. That is why after the liberation, as one of the few Jewish children, I still had my own parents whom I loved, against whom I rebelled as a teenager, and who moulded me into the man I am today. In our family we shared the grief of the Shoah, barely able to comprehend what had happened to us.

The Dutch Auschwitz Committee was founded in nineteen-fifty-six by a number of survivors of the extermination camps. When they returned to the Netherlands they encountered no understanding, they found no place, no compassion. The atmosphere was cold in the

Netherlands – the country from which more than one-hundred-seven-thousand Jewish residents were deported and only five-thousand returned. The Auschwitz Committee saw it as its task to tell what had happened and to represent the interests of those who had been murdered. Even today, the Auschwitz Committee sees “Auschwitz never again” as a mission to ensure that we never forget and that we continue to warn of where fascism, anti-Semitism and racial delusions can lead.

Twenty-five years ago, in nineteen-ninety-eight, I became chairman of the Dutch Auschwitz Committee. I made a solemn promise to the committee’s founders to continue their legacy, the fight against anti-Semitism, with every fibre of my being. And that fight is still necessary today. Anti-Semitism is rearing its ugly head all over the world, even in the Dutch parliament, where xenophobic nationalists are allied with propagators of insidious conspiracy theories

Resurgent nationalist sentiments form a dangerous breeding ground for the pursuit of ethnic purity: for “us, and not them”, for exclusion and division, like a loud echo from the twentieth century. “Auschwitz never again” is a message that bridges the gap between a period in history when things went so horribly wrong and the present, where things can go wrong again.

The Dutch Auschwitz Committee wants to keep the memory alive and educate new generations about the dangers of exclusion and discrimination. In September twenty-nineteen, we unveiled the National Holocaust Names Memorial in Amsterdam, a project I had been fighting for since two-thousand-six. It is a chilling and at the same time beautiful memorial, designed by Daniel Libeskind. The more than one-hundred-and-two-thousand murdered Jews and two-hundred-two murdered Roma and Sinti have regained their names and their place in the world in the heart of the Dutch capital.

The names of my family members who did not escape from the Jewish Theatre have also been returned to Amsterdam. Saartje, Isaïc, Claartje, Loesje, Jetje and Betje. Their names, along with thousands of others, serve as a warning to those alive today and to generations to come.

As a survivor of the Shoah, I was able to convert my pain and sorrow into energy and commitment to dedicate myself to “Auschwitz never again” and the creation of the National Holocaust Names Memorial.

They have not been forgotten and they will never be forgotten.