



# PRIME MINISTER

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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER  
RAOUL WALLENBERG TREE NAMING CEREMONY  
CANBERRA - 9 MARCH 1989

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

In a century that has seen too much proof of mankind's capacity for hatred, oppression, depravity and inhumanity, the heroism of Ralph Wallenberg is an inspiring beacon.

Wallenberg single handedly protected the lives of tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews from the Nazis in World War II. Those efforts truly place him in the select company of men and women who have made an indelible mark on human history through a selfless devotion to the safety and well being of their fellow human beings.

Raoul Wallenberg is one of the great heroes of the Holocaust. In the face of the almost unimaginable reality of the Final Solution, and the seemingly insuperable power and ambition of the Third Reich, Raoul Wallenberg proved that persecution can and must be opposed, whatever the appalling odds.

But the achievement of Raoul Wallenberg can be viewed not only as the achievement of a man involved, directly and with great valour, in the rescue of a great many persecuted people. The significance of his achievement today lies also in his importance as a living symbol of the broad horizons of human vision and compassion in defiance of danger and intolerance.

Thus we owe him a debt not only for the lives he has saved, but also for the inspiration he has provided and the direction he has furnished to guide future human endeavours.

In the words of one person who was saved by him, "Raoul Wallenberg symbolises the ideal that one person can make a difference."

I am moved and encouraged every time I hear anew the story of Raoul Wallenberg. He came to Budapest on a mission of mercy, prepared to follow any means, however unorthodox, to rescue the Jews and other potential victims of the Nazis.

He pursued this task with a tireless zeal and a courage that reflected total disregard for his own safety.

When Budapest was liberated early in January 1945 there were approximately 120,000 Jews still living in the city - the largest surviving Jewish population in all of occupied Europe. It is estimated that about five-sixths of this population owed their lives directly to the intervention of Raoul Wallenberg.

Among us here today I believe there are individuals and families whose personal histories link them directly to the actions taken by Raoul Wallenberg in war torn Hungary. To you I offer my very warmest regards.

And to everyone here today I confirm the commitment of my Government to seeing a satisfactory resolution to the mystery which continues to shroud the facts of Raoul Wallenberg's fate.

Not only was he denied the hero's return home to his native Sweden he so rightly deserved. He was arrested and plunged into oblivion, assigned to a fate that still has not been revealed.

The Swedish Government continues to pursue the Wallenberg case with the Soviet authorities. Australia has offered its full support to the Swedish Government in its attempt to elicit a satisfactory account from the Soviet authorities.

As I noted in the most recent newsletter of the Free Wallenberg Committee, international concern with the progress of the case continues to be strong from a wide cross-section of individuals and organisations.

Our concerns about Wallenberg - including the paucity of conclusive information on his fate - were raised in the context of my visit to the Soviet Union in late 1987. Soviet officials responded without elaboration, as they have on many previous occasions, that Mr Wallenberg died many years ago. Last September, it was stated simply that Wallenberg was cremated on July 17, 1947.

The struggle for truth and justice in the Raoul Wallenberg case is not new. For many years Wallenberg lobby groups in the West have been working in conjunction with Jewish organisations such as the Simon Wiesenthal Centre for Holocaust Studies in an attempt to establish the facts of Raoul Wallenberg's fate.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There are grounds these days for viewing the current world outlook with some optimism. Within the Soviet Union itself we have seen, with President Gorbachev's programs of perestroika and glasnost, a long overdue and still incomplete, but nevertheless very encouraging, movement away from the repression and inflexibility that for too long has characterised the Soviet system.

It is encouraging to note that significant improvements in human rights, including the fundamental right to profess and practise religious faiths, are in train. We acknowledge what is being done to improve the lot of Soviet Jews and Christians. We look to further progress.

Our objective is to help individuals suffering from abuse, be this on the basis of colour or creed. I believe that Australian involvement in human rights issues does have this effect.

Indeed, it is not too much to say that a transformation is occurring in the position of Soviet Jews. This is to the enormous credit of Governments and private citizens around the world who have raised their voices on this issue over many years, as well as to the spirit of change which has developed under Mr Gorbachev.

Successive Australian Governments, Australian public opinion, and the Australian-Jewish community, have played a notable role in this. The recent opening of the Solomon Mykhoels Cultural Centre in Moscow, in which the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, and its President, Mr Isi Leibler, played a very prominent role, is a striking example of the new spirit.

My friends,

There are many great challenges that still lie before us.

To some, these challenges may seem insuperably complex.

But we must not be daunted.

That most certainly was not the response of Raoul Wallenberg. By placing his faith in the belief that ideals could be realised and seemingly insurmountable obstacles overcome, Raoul Wallenberg went forward to perform one of the most significant rescue operations of our century.

It is immensely encouraging to know that admiration for Wallenberg's endeavour is shared by young Australians who were not even born when he made his sacrifice.

It is my hope that this tree that we name today, as it grows in perhaps the most significant plot of land that our nation can provide - here in the vicinity of Parliament House - will remind future visitors and legislators of the immensity of Wallenberg's achievement.

Raoul Wallenberg will live on in memory as long as new generations continue to be moved and inspired by his life and his action.

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