

Remarks by Mr. Shraga Milstein, a Holocaust survivor

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

United Nations Headquarters, New York, Monday, 27 January 20

**Mr. Secretary General of the United Nations,
The President of the General Assembly,
Fellow Survivors,
Your Excellencies,
Honorable Delegates and distinguished guests,**

On 1 September 1939 I was six years old eager to begin school in the first grade. But on that very date— 1 September 1939— the German army crossed the Polish border and WW2 began. I never attended the first grade. I was never able to learn in any school until 6 years later when I was 12 years old.

I was born in 1933 in Piotrkow in central Poland into a Jewish middle class family. My father Hillel, a businessman, my mother Rebekah a housewife and I still recall her playing the piano that stood in our living room, and my brother, Mordechai, 3 years younger than I.

The Nazis set up the first ghetto on Polish soil in my town on 8 October 1939. An area of houses, including ours, was fenced off. The ghetto housed 22,000 people in an area that was home to about 600 before the war. I was confined to my room and strictly warned not to leave it without an adult. This is my earliest memory of the Holocaust: the switch from free and comfortable life to being closed in a room at the age of 6 with constant fear of what the next hour will bring.

Life in the ghetto was bearable mainly because of the love and protection of our parents, who tried to prevent us from seeing blood or dead bodies, which were common sights in the streets. Then in 4 days beginning 14 October 1942 we were assembled in a big open square and had to walk, four in a row, past a ranking SS officer who stood on a balcony. As we reached him in fear, he was making with his finger to turn right or left. At the end of the day there were two separate groups. One was told to walk under guard to the railway station and the second to return to our homes.

This is my memory of the infamous “selections” conducted by the Nazis.

military command from the squalor of the concentration camp to proper housing and a clean bed in a nearby Wehrmacht military facility.

The Bergen Belsen camp was buried and on it a memorial today marks graves and an official site, museum and seminar center managed by the Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation, keeping the memory of the atrocities alive and presenting to visitors a world of human understanding, tolerance, freedom and democracy based on equality of every human being.

I was reunited with my brother and left in June 1945 to Sweden for convalescence as guests of the Swedish Red Cross and the Swedish government. I am grateful to the British forces for freeing us in Bergen Belsen and to the Swedish government and Red Cross for bringing us back to life.

I read of Israel just weeks before its Declaration of Independence in 1948 and live there since. Married, raised a family of 3 sons and 9 grandchildren all of whom are present with us today. As you recall I mentioned how I last saw my father so when my second son was born.

On 15 December 1958 we named him Hillel. 7 years later my brother's daughter was born also on 15 December and she was named Hillela. A few years ago I was invited to Buchenwald and learned from their archives that my father was shot on 15 December 1944. Makes you think...

Let me conclude by saying that the Holocaust is not only a historical event without proportions but also a guide to personal choices in present day life. Those of us who survived this atrocity and people of good will across the world firmly believe that it is our duty to condemn and prevent any intolerance against people based on ethnic origin or religion.

Thank you for allowing me to share my story with you today and may we never forget the lesson of the Holocaust.