



Speech

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Cymbalista Jewish Heritage Center

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Dear Co-Chairpersons of this event, Prof. Dina Porat and Ambassador Carl Magnus Nesser, thank you for hosting this important event.

Prof. Joseph Klafter, Prof. Raanan Cohen, my dear friend, Prof. Irwin Cotler, Mr Jens Orback, Prof. Yoram Dinstein, Ms. Talia Naamat, Cecilia Ahlberg, grand-niece of Raoul Wallenberg. Distinguished Guests.

I am very proud to stand here today, representing the International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation and carrying the greetings of our Chairman, Mr. Eduardo Eurnekian and our Founder, Mr. Baruch Tenenbaum.

The day after tomorrow, the world will mark the 70th anniversary of the disappearance of one of the greatest heroes known by mankind: Raoul Wallenberg.

Raoul's story has all the elements to become a Hollywood success. He was a remarkable hero, who saved scores of innocent lives in a very short period of time, from July 9th 1944 till Jan 16th, 1945. At the same time, he himself became a victim under the strangest of circumstances. His fate is a riddle, even today. On January 17th, 1945, Raoul Wallenberg went to see Marshal Rodion Malinovsky, head of the Soviet military forces that liberated Budapest. It is not clear whether he was summoned by the Soviet high-ranking officer or if he went by his own initiative with the purpose of discussing the future of the Jewish refugees. To be sure, Wallenberg himself had some misgivings, as he is believed to have said: "I'm going to Malinovsky's...whether as a guest or as a prisoner, I do not know yet".

He went to the rendezvous with his trusted driver, Vilmos Langfelder.



70 years to that doomed day and in fact, a cloud of mystery still surrounds their fate.

Despite the Soviet official admission that Wallenberg died on July 17, 1947, there is no real proof to substantiate that claim.

Back in 2006, our Foundation wrote a letter to the Russian Embassy in Washington, enquiring for credible information.

Mr. Alexander Darchiev, then Deputy Chief of Mission wrote to us: "...circumstantial evidence gathered by the Working Group, confirms that Mr. Wallenberg died or, most likely, perished in the USSR, on July 17, 1947". By "Working Group", Mr. Darchiev refers to the Russian side of the Joint Swedish-Russian Working Group which examined Wallenberg's case.

Mr. Darchiev continues by stating that: "The report of the Russian part of the Working Group contains a simple political conclusion – responsibility for the death of Mr. Wallenberg lies with the USSR leadership at that time and on Joseph Stalin personally".

This information might be true, but the problem is that it was never corroborated. Moreover, research work performed by an international Commission headed by Prof. Cotler, and later work by various researchers, including Dr. Makinen and Ms. Berger, would indicate that Raoul Wallenberg was alive after July 17, 1947.

Even if we challenge the conclusion advanced by Ambassador Darchiev, it seems that one element is accurate: The one referring to Stalin's personal responsibility to Wallenberg's personal fate.

It is hard to believe that Stalin was not involved in such a high-profile affair and it is even more unlikely that the physical apprehension, let alone liquidation of a foreign diplomat, and a member of one of the most powerful families in Sweden, would not leave a clear paper-trace.

That is why we continue asking the Russian authorities to enable an unfettered access to the KGB archives. Historians should be able to carefully study the archival evidences as they might shed a lot of light into the fate of Raoul and that of Mr. Langfelder.

We fail to understand the Russian obstinate stance not to allow such an access.



With great pain, we must admit that we also fail to understand the strange passivity adopted by the various Swedish Governments, from the day Wallenberg was abducted, to this very day. I must say so, with all due respect, in the presence of my friend, Ambassador Nesser. We believe that true friendship allows this type of direct talk.

Beyond its moral obligation towards Wallenberg, one must underscore that Sweden had and still has a great deal of diplomatic and economic leverage which could be used to bring Raoul back home.

Back in 2012, former Minister of Integration, Eric Ullenhag, made the following significant statement in an event hosted by Yad Vashem, in Jerusalem, on occasion of Raoul's centenary:

I quote: "I'm so proud to represent the same country as Raoul Wallenberg, but to be honest, I can't be proud of Swedish history concerning Wallenberg. I am sorry we left the Wallenberg family too alone. I am sorry that we did not, for a long time, tell the story of Raoul Wallenberg. I am sorry we did not dare to do enough to find-out what happened to the brave Swedish diplomat".

We think Mr. Ullenhag is right. Sweden could have done much more to bring her son back home. It is mind-boggling that she did not and still does not.

Not less perplexing is the passive stance adopted by the Wallenberg family. Raoul's father, who passed away before his son was born, was the first cousin of Jacob and Marcus Wallenberg, who at that time were at the helm of the Wallenberg economic empire. The sad truth is that the Wallenberg family profited from the Second World War. While Marcus was in charge of the commerce with the UK and other allies, Jacob dealt with the Germans. We have in our possession photocopies of Jacob's multiple Visa entries to Berlin during the War. Some historians have raised the conjecture that Raoul was apprehended by the Russians because of his family's dealings with the Nazis, which allegedly included cloaking of ownership of Nazi assets.. This should require a further investigation.



We also have the copy of a letter sent by Mr. John Pehle, who was the Executive Director of the War Refugee Board, the US Agency that sent Raoul to his life-saving mission to Budapest. This letter, dated September 18th, 1947, was addressed to his former boss, Henry Morgenthau, Jr., who as Secretary of the Treasury during WWII, pressed hard to establish the War Refugee Board with the aim of saving the remaining of the Jewish Hungarian community. I won't read Mr. Pehle's entire letter, which urges Morgenthau to try and extricate Wallenberg from the USSR, but I shall quote his Post Scriptum:

"I might add that while Raoul Wallenberg bears the name of a prominent and wealthy Swedish family, his problem and those of his immediate relatives are of no concern to the most prominent Wallenbergs."

Back in 2012, coinciding with Wallenberg's 100th birthday, the International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation instituted a 500,000 Euros reward for any person or entity that could provide scientifically-reliable information into the fate and whereabouts of Raoul Wallenberg and Vilmos Langfelder. We know this is a long shot, but is worth-trying. In all our efforts to try and shed light on this tragedy, we are inspired by the lifelong quest of Raoul's own brother, the late Professor Guy von Dardel, who dedicated his life to find-out the truth about Raoul's fate.

I would like to conclude my presentation by saying that in 2013, I had the privilege of meeting with another hero, Sir Nicholas Winton, who organized the famous Kindertransport from Czechoslovakia to the UK, saving the lives of 667 children, who were adopted by foster English families. He did so in 1936, with a lot of vision. I met him in London and had a lively chat with him. Why am I stressing that? Because Sir Nicholas Winton was born in 1909, namely, at that time, he was 104 years old and now he is 105 year old. He is 3 years older than Raoul Wallenberg.

He is absolutely lucid and still has a wonderful sense of humor. When I saw him, I could not avoid the feeling that Raoul could still be alive.



I know it is extremely unlikely, but one cannot control one's own thoughts.

We pledge to continue working to preserve and spread around the legacies of Raoul and all the other saviors. Today, for instance, in Rome, we are holding a ceremony at the Casa Santa Brigida, a local convent which gave refuge to Jewish women and children during the Holocaust. We shall unveil a special plaque, marking a place as a House of Life. This project goes on and so far we have identified already more than 100 houses of life across Europe.

We also pledge to continue struggling for Raoul the victim. We owe that much to him.

Thank you.