

**The remarks of the President of the Republic,  
H. E. Mr. Bujar NISHANI  
to the Raoul Wallenberg Foundation  
*JCC Manhattan, May 5th, 2015***

**Honorable Mr. Baruch Tenenbaum,**

**Honorable Chairman Eduardo Eurnekian**

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen!**

While wholeheartedly thanking you, please permit to state that I feel particularly flattered from the invitation and the opportunity you provided to me to address in order to briefly express a few thoughts and views about the appreciation you are bestowing upon me and through me, to the entire Albanian people!

In the capacity of the President of Albania I am more than convinced that your noble scope and mission to promote dialogue, understanding and peace among various individuals and nations regarding the preservation and enrichment of those holy values which were so selfishly and heroically preserved by Raoul Wallenberg will be accomplished and so successfully fulfilled in order to make the world we live in a better one, also for the upcoming generations.

**Distinguished participants and American-Jewish friends!**

Just a while ago, you distinguished Raoul Wallenberg Foundation made me an Honorary Member by providing me the chance and the lucky opportunity to join other heads of states, Nobel Prize laureates and many other personalities from all over the world who are trying to demonstrate and show to humanity the selfless deed of Raoul Wallenberg.

He sacrificed himself fighting against discrimination and lack of tolerance in order to save the Jews and not only them during the Shoah, – one of the darkest periods in the human history while not being alone in the mass of those noble people who bravely and uncompromisingly fought against prejudice and intolerance.

In Albania we have had our share of Raoul Wallenbergs, Oscar Schindlers - our innumerable, silent, stoic and heroic ones.

The Albanians families that sheltered and defended the Jews and who were honored with the Righteous among Nations award by the Yad Vashem's Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes Remembrance Authority numbered unto 2015 exactly 73 persons.

Among them beginning in 1992 were enlisted: the Bala family, Biçaku, Shaqir and Qamile Boriçi, Shyqyri and Xhemile Budo, Çiftja family, Frashëri and Hoti, Nuro Hoxha, Besim and Aishe Kadiu, the late photographer Mikel Kilica who sheltered and then married Vera Michnik from Poland, who escaped extermination from Nazi camps, Myrto, Nosi, Orgocka, Panariti, Pilku, Qoqja, Sheko, Shkurti, Toptani families, the distinguished Veseli from Kruja, Xhyheri all to the way to the family of Doctor Zyma and that of Babamusta in Kavaja, or even the Kazazi and Kristidhi families as well.

The help and assistance of the Albanians for Jews during the dark days of Shoah has been recognized and appreciated already even in the United States where among all these Albanian families ca be counted over 35 Muslim families and at least ten Christian ones.

There is even a long list that goes over one hundred other persons who are laying in wait to have their merits recognized and award bestowed, regardless of the fact that they held and kept their heroic deed hidden and secret by remaining silent without pumping their chests for what their grandfathers, parents or even themselves did without any kind of interest or asking anything in return.

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C. also recognized in 1995 the "Righteous among the Nations", and Awards were given to "the silent heroes" or to their children.

In 1996 the Israeli President Dr. Weismann exclaimed: *"The Israeli people will never forget that during the difficult years of WW II, they found in the Albanian people protection and genuine hospitality."*

While in 1997 during a ceremony held at the New York City Hall, honoring a "righteous Muslim", Abraham Foxman, the National Director of the Anti Defamation League stated: *"One can only wonder how many Jews could have been saved if other countries and communities acted with such resolve and solidarity in thwarting the Nazi's aim to kill every Jew in Europe"*.

Hence Albania did this miracle and achieved this through its diplomats all over the world who issued visas to the fleeing Jews, through its government officials of the 1930's and beginning of the 1940's, but above all, through the Albanian people that thanks to the old tradition and hospitality customs which sanctions that: *"The household of the*

*Albanian belongs to God and to the guest*” saved hundreds and thousand of human lives.

It is estimated that the number of Jews residing in Albania before the beginning of Second World War was about two hundred registered souls, while at the War’s end it reached the sum of two thousand people and this very meaningful fact speaks for itself without the need to be further commented.

Albania was not alone in this noble undertaking. Denmark evacuated by boats the majority of its Jews in one single night by safely taking them to Sweden, but what makes my country’s example a unique case it is exactly this tenfold increased number of the domestic and foreign Jews on Albanian soil. That is why we hold our heads high and feel proud, but we do not brag about it because we have just done more than a *mitzvah* – a good deed.

The most famous Albanian in the world, the unprecedented benevolent, who is laying in wait of being proclaimed a Saint, Mother Teresa, among other things, taught us an advice: “Try to do small good deed, but carry them out them with great affection.”

When the good deed is mentioned and repeated more than necessary, then it can sound as a debt that requires and is asking a repayment, but the Albanian case is completely different, because we saved in the very same manner the Italian soldiers after Fascist Italy’s capitulation, – soldiers faced the risk of being persecuted and executed by Nazi Germans.

I am deeply convinced that such noble and altruistic efforts would provide more strength to our common mission of promoting dialogue, understanding and peace among different individuals and nations, keeping clearly in mind that your holy Talmud has clearly determined that: “*He who rescues even a single human life has saved the whole world.*”

In the entire great human family, no other country could better illustrate through its concrete and rare example this vital lesson: through its defense, shelter and rescue of the Jews during the darkest period in the history of humanity, of Shoah.

**Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,**

We have already established a years' long tradition in Albanian President's Office headed by me: together with the Israeli Embassy to Tirana and with the small, but meaningful Albanian-Jewish community and many other friends and well-wishers we celebrate Chanukah, the festival of Lights.

That holy day of freedom and escaping slavery represents a very good and fitting opportunity to place on a pedestal and respect as well the freedom-loving feelings of any nation, let alone those of the Jews and the Albanians, who during their long centennial history have suffered greatly from the lack of freedom and self-determination.

Freedom is the most precious thing for mankind, but it is even harder for a human being to break free and escape the chains of mind by putting behind once and for all Anti-Semitism, racism, chauvinism, Communism, persecution, totalitarianism, terrorism.

The globe in which we live in at the present day is filled with innumerable dangers and threats, and that is why our common scope and aim is to build a better reality and world for ourselves, our children, for the future generations, because this represents our primary responsibility, especially that of the heads of states, governments and of leaders of various political and social organizations.

This is the unalienable mission of your Foundation and that is why I am accepting this award and appreciation with great pride, because it is not simply bestowed upon me in the capacity of the President and who according to Albanian Constitution represents the unity of the people.

I am accepting this appreciation which is being bestowed upon me on behalf of the entire Albanian people, on behalf of all those Righteous Albanian among Nations as a merit and recognition of their noble spirit defending the human values and life, which is the most precious thing in the world, regardless wherever it belongs to a Jew, to a Muslim or to a Christian!

**Thank you!**