

It is an honour for me, the President of the Hellenic Republic, to receive the Wallenberg Centennial Medal as a tribute to the Greek people.

Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish aristocrat who advanced humanitarian ideals through political courage, exceptional resourcefulness, spirited initiative, and eventually self-denial, helped save dozens of thousands Hungarian Jews in his capacity as the diplomatic envoy of Sweden to Budapest in 1944.

He thus became an exceptional figure among many Europeans who, in those dark days for European history, would assist and rescue those fellow human beings who were being persecuted by the Nazis.

Today's event is a propitious occasion for us to ponder on the current conditions for human rights and democratic freedoms which are being inexcusably put to the test. In the years of Nazi atrocities, Greek Christians and Jews rallied against barbarity.

Hitler's Germany and his accessories murdered 6 million Jews. Entire communities perished, including the Jewish community of Ioannina, my birthplace. The death toll for the Holocaust in Greece was 65,000 Greek Jews.

Last June I paid a visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. I stated that, and may I reiterate it here yet again, 'those who deny this great sacrifice of thousands of European citizens cannot be a part of the European family'. The Greek people, State and society alike, do have collective historical memory and consciousness. It is our duty to learn the lessons of the past. Rest assured we shall tolerate no speech or act of hatred, anti-Semitism, intolerance, religious fanaticism or racism whatsoever.

It is with these thoughts in mind that I wish to welcome you to Athens and thank you for the honour.