

Prof. Yehuda Bauer at the annual commemoration event

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, friends of Massua, Avner Shalev, it is I suppose the task or one of the main tasks of a historian to debunk myth. And what I would like to do is to address a myth that is common amongst all Israelis, from Ministers of the Government to the ordinary people on the street, common to friends of Israel all over the world, friends of the Jewish people, enemies of the Jewish People, enemies of Israel – they share the myth that Israel is the result of the Holocaust.

It's absolutely false. It's a myth. Never happened. Prior to World War II there were some 4 million, 4.5 million Jews in what was called Eastern Europe outside of the Soviet Union. These people couldn't stay where they were. They lived among hostile peoples, people who didn't like them, peoples who hated them, many of them, most of them.

There was an economic crisis of tremendous proportions. Of 3.3 million Jews in 1939 in Poland 1/3 were on or below the poverty level. Jewish children couldn't go to school because they didn't have shoes in the winter to go to school with.

There was a constant decline in the 1930s but there was nowhere to go. America was closed. Britain was closed. Western Europe had closed by then. South America was closed. Palestine was closed by the British

from 1936 on. In 1939 this closure became more tight, and tighter as time went on. But it was a hope.

Now, had there been a possibility for Jews to leave Eastern Europe to go to Palestine the estimate is that at least a third of these 4.5 million would immediately have taken the opportunity to come. But it would be extremely difficult. There were only half a million Jews in Palestine at the moment. But they would have come, not all at once.

You know, all of that was stopped by the Holocaust. There was nothing left out there. Out of 3.3 million Jews, 3 million Jews were killed. The Holocaust almost prevented the rise of the State of Israel. More Holocaust less Israel, that's the equation.

Well, it ended in 1945. Between 1945 and 1947 about 300 or 350,000 Jews, not only survivors, also to a large extent those Jews that had escaped to the interior of the Soviet Union and came back after the war, these 300 or 350,000 Jews came back to central Europe, largely to the American zones of Germany and Austria after the victory and they formed a small population there with whom the allies didn't know what to do.

The Americans didn't want them. The British certainly didn't want them. Nobody else didn't want them and most of them, rightly or wrongly, decided that the place for them was a place where they would determine their own destiny. The majority of them, a large majority wanted to go to Palestine and they were

not persuaded to that by Palestinian Jewish emissaries. In fact they criticized those emissaries for not being energetic enough to move the world to let them go where they wanted to go.

Between 1945 and 1948 69,000 European Jews and North African Jews wanted to go and did on illegal ships to come to this country. From 1946 they were prevented from doing so, shipped to Cyprus by the British, but there were thousands, tenth of thousands willing to do that, willing to spend time in detention camps in Cyprus, on their way, hopefully, to this place.

If the war had lasted for more than it has, if it had stopped in 1947 instead of 1945 there would have been no single survivor. There would have been nobody to press. There would have been nobody to come. There would have been no political issue. There would have been no Israel.

The idea that the world gave Israel to the Jews as a result of what they had suffered during World War II is total and absolute nonsense.

Look at what the historians can tell you today about the internal correspondence, the diplomatic correspondence of the various states that voted at the United Nations for or against the partition of Palestine. There was no mention of the Holocaust, of what we call today the Holocaust, the genocide of the Jews - no mention of that anywhere, not even those who advocated the partition of Palestine, the State of Israel.

People like Hernando Squatemala, for instance, a friend of the Jews, what motivated him was the pioneering efforts of the Jews in Palestine, the right of the Jewish People for independence and that sort of thing. The Holocaust-genocide of the Jews? Not a word.

Truman didn't want a State of Israel. He opposed it to the last moment. There was no mention of this anywhere in American diplomatic correspondence. No mention of that in French diplomatic correspondence. This is a total invention, a total myth. The considerations for or against the establishment of the State of Israel were of a diplomatic, political, global kind.

There was only one exception: Andre Gromiko, the Minister of Foreign affairs of the Soviet Union on May 14, 1947 made a speech in which he mentioned the destruction of the Jewish People in Europe during the 2nd World War. How genuine was that?

The Soviet Union opposed any mention of the Holocaust. The Soviet Union opposed any memory of the Holocaust by the Jews who had survived in the Soviet Union. They couldn't care or less.

What they wanted was to get the British out of the Middle East and the Jews were a good excuse to do that. And so for purely propagandistic purposes he mentioned that in his speech. It was a lie. It was propaganda. And he was the only one. Nobody else!

It's very important to debunk that myth, very important, because the State of Israel almost didn't come

into existence. It hanged by a thread. Yes, those survivors who had managed to get to central Europe were a major element. But they were the survivors, despite the Holocaust, despite it, not because of it.

And it was they who created the political conditions, the “kil de sac” where the Americans didn’t know what to do with them. They didn’t want them in America. The British wanted them out. Europe didn’t want them. Germany didn’t want them and they wanted to go. That created the discussion at the United Nations that resulted not in the establishment of the State of Israel but in the possibility of fighting for it.

The second thing that I would like to address is the relationship between the Holocaust and Genocide. You see, this is 60 years, a round figure, after the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide ratified in 1951; ratified by the United States in 1988, if you don’t mind.

By now the majority of the cultures in the world were ratified. It has never been applied because what it says there, in the Convention, is that if somebody recognizes something to be a Genocide they should turn to the Security Council. Well, good luck.

In the case of Danfur the United States turned to the Security Council. It was never applied.

The recognition of Genocide by the Convention is very important. It creates an international legal document, although it has never been used, but it creates

a threat for the perpetrators. It creates the possibility of action in the future. It is not a document that was formulated by academics, although it was initiated by an academic, a Polish Jewish refugee lawyer in New York by the name of Raphael Lemkin. It was he who pushed for it.

But what was adopted was something slightly different. It was a horse-trading document between the West and the East and it has so many pitfalls and loose ends and loopholes that you could drive a bus through it. And so I don't know of a single academic in the world and I deal with these issues that will agree with the definition of the Convention. I also don't know any two academics who will agree on any alternative. And so that's what we are stuck with.

But you see, the definitions of these things are extractions from realities and the realities are always much more difficult, much more complicated than our definitions are. And what we then do when we have these social and political definitions? We try to press the reality into the definition instead of trying to change the definition to fit the reality.

So what I am dealing with here is not a definition of the Convention about Genocide, which means in fact: the inhalation of groups of humans. You grossly can define whether they are political or religious or ethnic or racial or national. So what we have to deal with is the propensity of human beings: Who are we?

We are territorial, predator mammals. That's what we are. We live by hunting. Today we go to Super to buy meat, but as hunting we eat meat, we eat fish. We are hunters. We are killers by instinct, by necessity. Now, this is what we have to contend with.

Fortunately there is the opposite instinct in us as well, because we are weak predators. None of you fortunately has the teeth of tigers or the claws of bears. And so we need collaboration, cooperation that developed in a human society, the feeling for friendship, for love, for sense sacrifice for it.

That is there too and the Holocaust is such a terrific example, because on the same margins of the mass murder there were none-Jews who saved Jews, there were Jews who saved Jews and believe it or not, there were Jews who saved none-Jews in the Holocaust.

Now, what is the parallel between the Holocaust and other Genocide? Primarily the suffering of the victims! It is always the same. There is no difference between a Jew and a Tutsi and a Gipsy and a Russian and a German and a Pole, and a Chinese and anyone else in the world who is undergoing that kind of an experience of mass murder and mass killing mass extermination.

There is no better Genocide than another Genocide. There is no better mass killing of children than other killing of children. There is no better rape than another rape. There is no better torture than another torture. The suffering of the victims is always the same.

The way that these genocidal mass-murders are committed always uses the best possible means in the hands of the perpetrators. The Germans had gas so they used it. The ... didn't have any gas so they didn't use it. They used other means. Always the ones that are best suited to the situation. That's another paradigm. There are some other paradigms.

What are the differences? You see, in my view and I challenge anyone to contradict that, there is no Genocide and Genocide has been with humanity from time immemorial and before that. There is no Genocidal event where there are elements that are not repeated in yet other Genocides. Always you can find parallels between any Genocide you take and other Genocides.

But in the Genocide of the Jews, which we improperly and incorrectly call the Holocaust, there are elements that are not repeated in any other Genocide so far! So far! But humanity is developing and what happened in the past can be repeated in the future, because the Holocaust didn't happen because of the intervention of some God or Satan. It's a human perpetration of a crime. And anything that humans do can be repeated – not in exactly the same way, of course, but in approximately similar ways.

So the Holocaust is not unique. Uniqueness would mean that it cannot be repeated. But it can be repeated. So it's not unique, it's unprecedented, which means that it's a precedent or could be a precedent. But it shouldn't

be a precedent. It should be a warning. That's why you are here today.

Now, what are these elements that are unprecedented in the Genocide of the Jews? There are many but I will pick out five: Totality – National Socialist Germany and its allies and collaborators tried to find every single person **they** defined as being Jewish. **They** defined as being Jewish.

Identify that person, mark that person, register, humiliate, disposes, concentrate, transport and kill! Every single individual they could lay their hands on, every single person who was descended from three or four Jewish grandparents was sentenced to die for the crime of having been born.

That is unprecedented in human history. It was supposed to happen everywhere in the world. There are many documents to prove that.

But one where we have a stenographic record of a meeting on the 28th of November 1941 between Hitler and the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hadjamil El Husaini, a Nazi collaborator who was living in Berlin. And because Husaini didn't know German and Hitler didn't know Arabic there was a translator who took down stenographic notes. We have them.

And Hitler said explicitly that, O.K., the Middle East, don't worry. We'll deal with the Jews there like we deal with them here once we conquer it. And when we win the war, Hitler says, we shall turn to the countries of

the world and ask of them to deal with the Jews the way we are dealing with them in this continent.

This was for the first time in human history a globally, universally conceived Genocide - save elemented ideology, every Genocidal event is accompanied by ideology that rationalizes the event, obviously. But in all the other cases it has a pragmatic element in it, a pragmatic sense: Political, economic, military element. There are practical things that people want to achieve by killing the other people, practical aims.

With the murder of the Jews there was no practical aim at all - none at all. The Jews were not killed because of their property. Their property was taken away from them as a result of their being killed. You see, there is this legend again: property. No. Yes, they took away their property of course, why not? We are going to kill them.

What were the reasons for their killing? Nightmares! This small group of people wants to control the world - that's what the Nazis said, Jewish world conspiracy - an ancient idea. It was a mirror image of what the Nazis wanted to do. They wanted to control the world. The Jews are murdering none-Jewish children for their special food, the Matzoth, the Passover bread in Passover, other things like that.

The Jews are coveting culture. These are constructs, ideological constructs. There was no real

relation between that and the real Jews and the real situation. It was a none-pragmatic ideology. At Lodz works in Polish, was the second largest ghetto in Poland. It was a large ghetto that survived in Poland in 1944.

It was kept alive because it was producing cloth to 90% of all the uniforms of the Wehrmacht. So the army wanted to keep it going and the local Nazis wanted to keep it going because they were getting bribes and they were squeezing out money from the ghetto. They were living very well there and if the ghetto was destroyed they will be sent to the Eastern front. They were all young men.

From a practical point of view, from a pragmatic point of view this was marvelous for the Germans. But then came an order from Himmler directly, in 1944, no more consideration. Jews must be killed. Is that capitalistic, cost effective, pragmatic? Nonsense! A none-pragmatic ideology, a nightmare and for that nightmare they murdered millions of people.

For the first time in human history the genocidal event happened not because of real reasons, you know, pragmatic reasons but because of nightmarish ideas. For the race - a new concept! There are no races my friends. We all come from East Africa about half a million years ago. That's been proved by DNA probs. There are no races. There is only one human race.

But there is racism, yes. Of course, a construct, and the Nazis wanted to create a new world-hierarchy

with the Nordic peoples of the Arian race - The Nordic People didn't like the Nazis but that was quite irrelevant. - Nordic peoples of the Arian race at the top and everybody else below them in the hierarchy. No Jews, because there wouldn't be any Jews anymore.

But the con..., the Satan, the anti-God with the Nordic peoples of the Arian race as the gods, the godly people, the Jews as the satanic people.

This concentration then you can find in the big meetings of the Nazi party at Nierenberg in the 1930s, where you have huge numbers of people in a large area, at night always, with projectors over them, light projectors creating godly ha... They are in a cathedral, and there is an altar. Well, actually it's a speakers' platform. It looks like an altar and behind that there is a cross. Well it's a swastika but it looks like a cross more or less, and then comes the Messiah, the savior himself to talk to the people, God himself.

When you have a God you have to have a Satan. Right? There was the Satan and that is the fourth element. This unprecedented idea of a new revolution - Communism has been there before and the French Revolution won a class instead of another. And the original Communist idea, the Proletarian instead of the bourgeoisie? That's been there before. But race a construct? Never!

And the fifth is that the Nazis wanted to destroy what we, inaccurately again, know as Western

civilization. And the Jews are the last remnant of the origins of that civilization, because the Greeks, the ancient Greeks are no more. The ancient Romans are no more. People who live there speak different languages, pray to different Gods, and create different types of literature.

But the Jews are still there. Well, not biologically maybe, but culturally it's a continuum. The Jews are not a race. You know, you go out here into the next town you will see black Jews and white Jews and brown Jews and if they were green and blue people in the world you would have green and blue Jews too.

But they are a culture, a civilization with a tremendous past and present. And my grandchildren read stuff that was written 3,000 years ago without a dictionary.

You know, you try that if you come from English speaking countries, you try that with Chaucer, which you won't get very far and if come from a French speaking areas try to read the Troubadours. If you come from German speaking areas, out from the Vogelweizen and so on and so forth.

This is a continuation and the Nazis were aware of it. This is conscious, not only with Hitler, but with hundreds of professors, Nazi professors at the German universities, that we are, this is a symbol, the Jews are the symbol of the civilization that they want do destroy.

It's quite actually logical, you know, that the Jews

were chosen for this. These unprecedented elements, there are more. Again, it's an unprecedented precedent. Such a meaning is unprecedented. That's why there is a connection between this Jewish specificity of the Holocaust and the universal meaning of the Holocaust. It's universal because it's specific. It's specific because it's universal. It's two sides of the same coin.

When in 2006, January 2006 I was honored to be the first speaker at the General Assembly of the United Nations on the Holocaust Memorial Day, I thought that Darfur could be solved. I am no longer sure. It's up to us. Isn't there a connection between that and the Holocaust? You bet.

The Holocaust is the most extreme form of a ... that affects all of us and because it's the most extreme case we have to start from that. We can't deal with everything, which doesn't mean to say we shouldn't deal with the other things. Quite the contrary. To start with a paradigm, with a paradigmatic genocide and then you deal with others, if you can.

Can we deal with it? I am not sure. But we are not obliged to succeed. We are obliged to try. And that is the message of the decision of the United Nations of November 2005, to establish this date. You know, the 27th of January is symbolic. 27th of January was the liberation of Auschwitz by the Red Army.

It didn't stop the genocide. It carried on for another three and half months. There were hundreds of

thousands I am not exaggerating, hundreds of thousands of Jews and others who were killed between 27th of January and 8th of May 1945.

It's symbolic because the Holocaust was not the last genocide, like the liberation of Auschwitz there was a continuation, so from the Holocaust there is a continuation. Will there be an 8th of May for all of humanity? I can only hope. Thank you.