ARYEH RUBIN

Yom Hashoah, 5765 May 5, 2005

Greetings:

We used to say, and we used to believe, that the horrors of the Holocaust would not be repeated. We used to say "Never again" and mean it. Now, as we continue to be appalled by current and recent genocides throughout the world, "Never again" has a hollow ring. According to Holocaust scholar Michael Berenbaum, we can no longer say "Never again," but we can say "Not this time" and "Not on my watch." But can we? What can we do to address past and present atrocities and stop such events from occurring in the future?

Much of the answer lies in our response to history. In addressing the past horrors, seeking justice for those who have gone unpunished, making available knowledge about the Holocaust, and doing our utmost to ensure that people do not forget, we are taking a stand. In not forgetting and in seeking retribution for past crimes we are implicitly promising to seek justice for current and future crimes. In this way, I believe our actions are a deterrent to genocide. Every time we bring to justice a Nazi war criminal or publish the account of a survivor, we are saying that these situations are unacceptable, and that we will not rest.

To this end, Targum Shlishi is involved in supporting two significant projects, Operation Last Chance and Voices from the Ashes.

Operation Last Chance is a project I conceived and then initiated with Efraim Zuroff, director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Israel office. Launched in July 2002, the program's goal is to bring remaining Nazi war criminals to justice by offering financial rewards for information leading to their arrest and conviction. The program has been launched in nine countries to date, the most recent being Germany in January 2005. As of April 15, we had received 364 names and had submitted 79 to prosecutors.

More about Targum Shlishi's support of Operation Last Chance here.

Operation Last Chance's website: www.operationlastchance.org

Comprehensive article about Operation Last Chance by Efraim Zuroff in Shalom magazine. Translation in English, German, French.

In late April we were pleased to announce that Hungary submitted an extradition request for a suspected Hungarian Nazi war criminal, Karoly (Charles) Zentai, currently living in Australia. This request was a direct outgrowth of Operation Last Chance, launched in Hungary in July 2004. The Simon Wiesenthal

Center found Zentai living in Perth, Australia and verified that he was alive, healthy, and able to stand trial. Australia is now reviewing the request. Zentai is suspected of being involved in the fatal beating of 18-year-old Peter Balazs in 1944 at a Budapest army barracks. Other evidence suggests that Zentai was involved in frequent hunting down, beating, and torturing of Jews.

Jerusalem Post article about extradition request here.

In addition, we just received word on May 4 that, as a result of the efforts of Operation Last Chance, a Croatian court ordered a probe of war crime allegations against Milivoj Asner. Information about Asner generated the program's first reward in November 2004. Asner, 92, was the police chief of the city of Slavonska Pozega during World War II and is suspected of cries against Jews and Serbs. As a result of investigation by Operation Last Chance, Asner fled Croatia in early July 2004. He was found living in Klagenfurt, Austria. The probe is expected to open within the next three weeks.

Reaction to Operation Last Chance has been mixed. Some countries have greeted us with hospitality, in others we have felt hostility. Again and again, we are asked, Why now? Why now, when the few remaining Nazi war criminals are so old, their crimes so long ago? That, we say, is exactly the point. As often as we are asked, we reply that the passage of time does not diminish the severity of the crimes. It does not diminish the responsibility of the perpetrators. We feel it is our responsibility to expose as many Nazi war criminals as possible in the little time there is left to do so.

Voices from the Ashes is a foundation created to translate into English and publish an archive of approximately 7300 early testimonies from Holocaust survivors throughout Poland housed in the Jewish Historical Institute (JHI) in Warsaw. It is believed to be the largest extant archive of early testimonies, with accounts collected beginning in August 1944. Our support has gone to translate 500 testimonies.

My father's family is from Poland, from Tomaszow Lubelski, a town very close to the Russian border. Most of the town's Jews fled to Russian and then Siberia after the German occupation, and we never knew what became of the Jews that stayed. The archive has one testimony from a resident of Tomaszow Lubelski. As I read the testimony, read what became of this town of 12,000 Jews, and read references to my grandfather, my father and his siblings, chills of recognition joined feelings of anger, sorrow and, as always, disbelief at the utter destruction.

The account is from a woman named Chana Wajsleder-Szpizajren who survived the war hidden by a Polish friend. Her testimony, taken in 1949, begins in 1939. She recalled that in the ghetto, "There were no beggars seeking charity…because practically all of us were beggars." Her account becomes a litany of deprivation. "There was no milk…There was no contact with foreign countries….There were no newspapers. There was no orphanage….There was no doctor….There were no schools. There were no rabbis or secret classes…" And then I read about my grandfather. She wrote, "There was no rabbi in Tomaszow Lubelski, for at the beginning of the war he escaped together with his wife and children to Russia. He was known as the Cieszyner rabbi. He died in Russia. His wife and eight children survived. His wife is already in America and the children in the American Zone [in Germany]."

Actually, her information is not correct. Only five children survived.

More about Targum Shlishi's support of Voices from the Ashes here. English translation of the testimony PDF of the handwritten testimony in Polish

So when people ask why Operation Last Chance and why now, after so much time, I can say, read Chana Wajsleder-Szpizajren's testimony. We have an obligation. We must remember. And we must remind people, loudly and often, because the world is full of people who would rather forget, who would rather look away, who would rather not know.

Yom Hashoah is a day when we are ceremonially reminded of this obligation. But it is an obligation that is with us not only one day of the year, but every day of every year.

Sincerely, ***Aryeh Rubin*** Targum Shlishi