

**HELLENIC REPUBLIC
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS**

PRESS RELEASE

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**addressed to teachers and students
on the Holocaust Remembrance Day, 27 January 2016**

The date 27 January has been established as an annual International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust by a resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2005, 60 years after the Second World War. This was preceded by a Declaration adopted by the Council of Europe in 2002 on the initiative of Ministers of Education.

The date 27 January 1945 marks the end of the Holocaust, the day in which Auschwitz was liberated by the Soviet soldiers. Auschwitz has become the emblematic site of systematic and mass extermination of European Jews and Roma during the Second World War. Over 1,000,000 people have been murdered in gas chambers and due to cruel treatment in this concentration camp.

The term Holocaust refers to the mass destruction, the murder, of nearly six million European Jews by Nazis. This genocide was a coordinated plan with the aim of annihilating the Jewish people. The unique feature of Jews' genocide which was unprecedented, was that they have been persecuted all over German occupied Europe, they have been singled out, segregated, executed or deported by trains to concentration camps in order to be murdered.

On this anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs invites the education community, the educators along with the students, to consider the significance of the Holocaust as a fracture in our history and in our civilization. As our education system aims at shaping personalities able to reflect lucidly and with a sense of responsibility, today's Remembrance Day could be a starting point for developing a historical conscience and political awareness among students providing them with a proactive stance in defending democratic values against racism, anti-Semitism, intolerance, prejudice and discrimination. The extermination of the European Jews was a chapter in history full of extreme violence and pain, perpetrated by hundreds of thousands of people who allowed this to happen. At the time of war, when atrocities and persecutions occurred, indifference was equivalent to death sentence while solidarity could save lives and preserve fundamental values of our civilization: dignity and respect. In this respect, the Holocaust does not concern only the Jews but all of us who share the past and the values of our democratic civilization.

The Holocaust had a global impact but it took place in civilized Europe and it is a matter of concern for us all. The plan of a new order based on the so-called racial hierarchy and the sovereignty of one race over the others was conceived and put into practice in Europe. The result was the murder of groups of people considered different. Right in the heart of Europe, Jews were gradually discriminated, deported and exterminated. Greek History, as part of European and World History, proved no exception. Over 75,000 Jews lived in Greece before the war in small or larger communities. The communities of Thessaloniki and Ioannina were almost completely annihilated, all Jews in Zakynthos were rescued, many in Katerini, in Volos and in Athens. Some fled, some others joined resisters and fought with them against Germans, some found refuge thanks to the solidarity and the support of their fellow citizens, others were betrayed and exploited by them. By and large, Greek Jews were violently uprooted since the overwhelming majority of them was deported to concentration camps of the Third Reich and exterminated. From March to August 1943 the large historical community of Thessaloniki was annihilated and in 1944 deportations escalated from Didymoteicho to Corfu and from Crete to Rhodes. When Greece was liberated, less than 11,000 Greek Jews had survived.

In the context of the curriculum, teaching the Holocaust raises pedagogical and moral issues. It is related to the long and rich history of Jewish communities in Greece and it constitutes a key point in teaching Second World War. Additionally it is related to World History and Greek History on anti-Semitism and discrimination. It highlights the risks involved in violating democratic values and in ignoring our neighbor's grief. Teachers may guide their students, in accordance with the age group, on studying the history and discussion of the Holocaust and its consequences. Adequate support material is available in published scientific literature and in Jewish museums.

It is everyone's duty – teachers', parents' and students' - to reflect on the path that led to the Holocaust, especially at a time like this when racism and anti-Semitism reappear in Europe. The smoke rising from the crematoria was the outcome of a process which started with hate speech discriminating people, stigmatizing those who weren't part of the majority, asking people to disdain, spit and cause suffering to fellow citizens who were treated not as human beings, but as "parasites" or "asocial" infecting the "healthy" society. This hate speech begun only as extremists' opinions, but it bore fruit when the economic crisis stroke society and brought people to despair.

Today, the example of the Greek "Righteous among the Nations", the Greeks who risked their lives under German occupation to rescue Greek Jews, is a light of hope showing the path of virtue and democracy. Let us follow it.

Translated by: Callis MITRAKA