

**80TH ANNIVERSARY OF KRISTALLNACHT
COMMEMORATION
AUSTRIAN PARLIAMENT
ADDRESS BY:
RABBI ARTHUR SCHNEIER
PRESIDENT & FOUNDER, APPEAL OF CONSCIENCE
FOUNDATION, NEW YORK
SENIOR RABBI, PARK EAST SYNAGOGUE, NEW YORK
NOVEMBER 9, 2018
VIENNA, AUSTRIA**

Dear Mr. Federal President,

Dear Mr. President of the Federal Parliament,

Dear Mr. Chancellor,

Dear Members of the Federal Government,

Dear Members of the religious communities

Ladies and Gentlemen,

**I would like to thank the President of the Austrian
Parliament, Mr. Wolfgang Sobotka, very much for the
opportunity to speak to you in the parliament. I would also
like to extend my thanks to the Federal President of the**

**Republic of Austria, Alexander Van der Bellen, and to
Chancellor Sebastian Kurz.**

I come to you with a heavy heart from the United States, a heart full of pain. I have visited the mourning Pittsburgh and the Tree of Life Synagogue. 11 green leaves were ripped from this tree. The synagogue, a house of prayer, was turned into a house of death and horror.

The massacre in Pittsburgh reminded me of my own synagogue, the Polnische Tempel, in Leopoldsgasse. On November 9th and 10th, 1938, Wednesday and Thursday, I was in Vienna, my birthplace. My Synagogue was set on fire. Police and firefighter stood by and they did not care about the Synagogue that was burning to the ground, but solely the buildings nearby. The massacre in Pittsburgh reminded me of the countless Jews who were murdered in Vienna. I witnessed who SS and SA troops vandalized and plundered the apartments in our building, Leopoldsgasse 16. The next morning, on my way to school, I saw how Jewish men lined

up in front of the Rossauer Kaserne, waiting for their deportation to the concentration camps of Dachau and Buchenwald. Some never returned.

My grandfather, Joseph Schneier, was deported to Theresienstadt in 1941 and from there to a death camp in Lublin. My grandparents in Hungary who were deported in 1944 found their death in the crematories of Auschwitz.

A few days before my eighth birthday, my beautiful Viennese childhood world had collapsed. I can still hear the parting words of Chancellor Schuschnigg, “Gott schütze Österreich.” A few hours later, all the houses were decked out in swastika flags. Overnight, I had become an outsider. Most of my Christian classmates shunned me. I became a “Unerwünschter”, an unwanted person: In the classroom, in the park, on the football field, in the pastry shop. “Jews and dogs not wanted here.” I learned my first lesson that children are not born with hatred but that they are taught to hate.

Heinrich Heine spoke as a prophet when he said, “Where book are burned, in the end humans will be burned, too.” My experience taught me that those who burn Synagogues will go on to murder people.

Religious sites are part of a valuable cultural and societal heritage. It is a shame that so many churches, mosques and synagogues have been destroyed in Europe. I am shocked when even a single religious site, a single house of God is being destroyed, when cemeteries and monuments are being vandalized. The interfaith Appeal of Conscience Foundation which I founded in 1965, I advanced United Nations resolution in 2001 for the Protection of Religious Sites, supported by the European Catholic Bishops' Conference. The resolution compels every country to stand for the protection of religious sites.

I was one of approximately 200,000 Jews who lived in Vienna in 1938. I survived the war in Hungary. When I came back to Vienna in 1946 the city was divided into four zones of occupation. I had survived the Nazi terror. Now I experienced the totalitarianism of Stalin's Soviet Union. I wanted to leave Vienna to live in freedom in the United States.

After the experiences of the Holocaust, I did not think that we have to talk about anti-Semitism once more.

Unfortunately, I was wrong. After World War II, the cancer of anti-Semitism seemed to be in remission. Anti-semitism was no longer socially acceptable. But now the cancer is back and it has metastasized in Europe and now in the United States. The internet has turned to a space for anti-Semites where they find one another, where they push each other and where they advance their criminal activities.

In Pittsburgh I witnessed once more the “Beast of Man”. A Nazi terrorist who attacked and murdered people in prayer. Terrorist will attack houses of worship on the holiest of days, no matter if that day is the Sabbath, if it is a Friday or a Sunday. Places of worship are the jugular vein of every religion. The anti-Semitic attacker of Pittsburgh has tried to inflict a wound on such a jugular vein. It is the responsibility of political and religious leaders as well as the media to contribute to the eradication of this scourge that undermines society as a whole.

But once more, I witnessed the best in man in Pittsburgh. I visited wounded police officers who threw their bodies between the attacker and the precious lives of other. On the day that we are commemorating the 1938 pogroms and on the day on which we are full of grief over the anti-Semitic attacks in Pittsburgh; on this day I want to say to you that we cannot let ourselves be paralyzed by the past. The present and the future hold too many challenges. We must remember and not only restrict ourselves to the past.

I was born in Vienna, but I was forced from Vienna. I was born in Vienna, but I have never left Vienna. I returned to Vienna. I saw in Vienna a city that could be a bridge between the East and the West. And I have used Vienna as such a bridge. On the occasion of many travels to the city I had the privilege of getting to know many leading Austrian statesmen who became partners on behalf of freedom and human rights.

Vienna has played a special role as a destination and a pathway for about 200,000 refugees who had to flee their country after the revolution in Hungary was suppressed. For those Jews who could emigrate from the Soviet Union, Vienna was an important waypoint on their way to Israel. During the war in former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, many refugees came through and to Vienna. The United Nations have used Vienna as bridge, too. The UN has moved important organizations to Vienna in order to build bridges to the world. Austria has served as a bridge for the Appeal of Conscience Foundation for those that faced oppression

under communist rule. Austria has served as a bridge when we brought together religious leaders, among them Karl Cardinal König and Christoph Cardinal Schönborn to set and end to the devastations in the former Yugoslavia and in the Caucasus.

As a Holocaust survivor I have devoted my life's work to peaceful co-existence. As president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, a coalition of business and religious leaders for over half a century, we have helped advance religious freedom, human rights and mutual understanding and strengthening people to people relations. Early in my life I have witnessed both the "Beast of Man and the "Best of Man". It is my firm believe that the best in man will prevail. United against hatred we will prevail - divided we will fail."

I have devoted my life to building bridges. Bridges connect and unite. They are the opposite of division and disunity. The Austrian people has painfully experienced in its history how internal division led to the country falling for the false

promises of the “Anschluss”. Of course, those promises were false and Austria experienced the biggest catastrophe in its history. We can learn from this that disunity and division, that hatred and discord are the false answers to the many questions that living together in a society asks from us.

In the Bible, we are commanded to Zachor, to remember Amalek, enemies of the Jewish and their successors, who perpetrated evil against humanity. I experienced man’s inhumanity to man throughout the Holocaust but I am not paralyzed by those memories. The scars are there, but it has been my resolve to build bridges of understanding and to respect every member of the human family, regardless of creed, race, majority or minority.

Holocaust survivors are particularly pained by Holocaust denial. Let us remember that tyrants to this day mean what they say and will use everything in their power to advance their evil diabolic plans. This is especially true for the threat of Iran’s Ali Khamenei to destroy Israel. Austria has

accepted its historic responsibility. Today, Austria can stand for Israel's peace and security.

Antisemitism not only victimizes Jews, it is an indicator of how society treats other religious, ethnic and racial minorities. Antisemitism is a hate crime by those who want to erase the dignity and values of each and every human being. It is the tip of the iceberg. It is the fodder for violence against humanity, culminating in crimes of racism and xenophobia. In the Book of Leviticus it is said: "neither shalt thou stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor." Silence is not the answer. It only encourages the perpetrators and demands a high toll in the end. We must isolate the lepers who incite hatred and conflict and reject peaceful co-existence.

Wednesday, October 31, 2018, the Appeal of Conscience Foundation brought together at my Synagogue, Park East Synagogue, a gathering of Unity Against Hate. We assembled in solidarity with the Jewish community in Pittsburgh and united against any form of hatred. The Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, Cardinal Dolan, and top leaders of the Catholic, Protestant and Greek Orthodox and Muslim communities proclaimed “We Stand Together”. The Secretary General, in a clarion call, called for common action against the increase of antisemitism.

The Austria of today is not the Austria of 1938. I want to thank Chancellor Kurz that he has committed his country to a policy of zero tolerance against antisemitism. In 2017, Austria has adopted the working definition of anti-Semitism of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. I want to thank Austria for that, too, as well as for setting up the Austrian National Fund for the Victims of the Holocaust. For November 20th and 21st, Austria, as the president of the

EU Council, has convened an Antisemitism conference in Vienna to discuss with Jewish organizations measures to combat anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism in Europe.

Austria has the duty to protect its Jewish communities against anti-Semitism. Because anti-Semitism is back. Silently through the language used by media who disseminate openly radical extremist views that are publicly funded. I would therefore like to thank Chancellor Kurz that he has committed to this responsibility. He has assured us that Austria will do everything to combat any form of anti-Semitism.

On the issues of worldwide conflict resolution and in the fight against anti-Semitism and every form of hatred, Austria has an important role to play, as well. A small country is like a tugboat. The biggest ocean liner cannot come to port without the help of a tug and a pilot. Great powers need tugboats and pilot boats, and Austria has played this role again and again.

We have to win over the silent majority and shake them awake. I am convinced that the silent majority does not want division and hatred. The silent majority want peaceful coexistence in mutual respect.

Peaceful coexistence is what we have to strive for. Let's not call it tolerance – we should not just tolerate one another but accept each other and respect each other. I say it once more: United we will prevail, divided, we will fail. I am convinced that unity is possible. Sooner or later, every conflict comes to an end, no hostility lasts forever.

These days we are commemorating the 100th anniversary of the end of WWI. More than 50 million people perished in that war, civilians and military. In WWII, more than 65 million people died, the Holocaust claimed 6 million Jewish lives. United States lost over 400,000 soldiers in WWII, to liberate and lift the yoke of oppression. We have to strive to prevent wars and save lives.

Today, I would like to thank you all, the representatives of parliament, as well as the members of the Federal Government. In our times, it is not an easy decision to enter politics. I would like to thank you all the more for your engagement for democracy and the rule of law in Austria.

80 years after, Kristallnacht I am standing in front of you and I am speaking to you. I am speaking to you in the presence of more than 100 survivors of the Holocaust who have found a new home in Israel. I live in the US but I have never truly left Austria. What is in the past cannot be changed. But we can and have to remember it. And we must learn from the past.

The twigs of a tree are like the nations of this world. And the leaves on these twigs are the human beings of this world. Let us work together for a clear commitment: Never again.

Today, we have the opportunity to shape the future, for our children and grandchildren, for all the leaves on the tree of

life. Together we can work for peace, freedom, democracy and human rights. May God bless our common work!