

**Remarks for Yom Ha'Shoah  
1 April, 2018 Brisbane, Australia**

**Address by Professor Alex Bellamy**

Never have I felt so utterly unqualified to take the floor. It is impossible to follow someone so quite literally awe-inspiring as Dr. Bert Klug – a man who passed courageously through the valley of hell and emerged from it, with his beloved wife, Eva, to make such a remarkable contribution to life in Brisbane and Australia.

Bert's story is one of outstanding courage and determination, but also one of compassion and – perhaps most importantly of all – of love.

There are many important messages and lessons here, but there is one in particular that I want to focus on in my brief comments, because I think it is something that the wider community and our political leaders are in danger of forgetting: the central importance of resistance to evil; resistance despite the cost.

Resistance to genocide matters because it is through resistance that the common bonds of our humanity are preserved and human dignity upheld.

It matters because resistance saves lives, lives that have the potential to be as full, rich and valuable as Bert and Eva Klug's.

Lives that help build communities and enrich the lives of others.

And resistance matters because history teaches us that when groups driven by evil ideologies such as National Socialism turn to genocide, the killing will end only when the perpetrators are defeated or when they have succeeded in their awful goal.

Yet, today, the imperative of resistance is being swamped by other imperatives: be it peace, consensus, impartiality, order, stability, or the avoidance of risks and costs. These are all important in and of themselves, of course, but they will not suffice in the fight against genocide.

As Elie Wiesel explained: “we must always take sides, Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented”.

For an example of how the importance resistance is being overlooked we might consider the fate of one of the world's most iconic images of Nazi brutality - albeit one that preceded the mass killing phase of the Holocaust – Pablo Picasso's painting, *Guernica*.

On 26 April, 1937, the *Luftwaffe* devastated the Basque village of Guernica in one of the first modern terror bombing attacks from the air. Between 800 and 1600 civilians were killed. In the wake of the attack, the Spanish Republican government – then at war with Franco's Fascists – asked Picasso to paint a piece for the Spanish pavilion at the 1938 Paris World Fair.

The result, the epic painting *Guernica*, is a compelling and deeply moving portrayal of the horror of fascist violence. But buried within it, Picasso conveyed an important message: a demand for resistance. In the centre of the painting, a dismembered arm ends in an unbroken clenched fist: a sign of unending resistance. The painting was hung in the Spanish pavilion

at the World Fair, next to Nazi Germany's grotesque pavilion – another act of resistance. It then toured Europe at the artist's request, to raise funds so that the Spanish Republican army could buy the arms and ammunition it needed to continue to resist the fascists.

Today, though, *Guernica* is most commonly interpreted by museums and commentators as a call to peace. A meditation on the horrors of war. But it was no such thing. For Picasso, it was a critique of fascism and Nazism and a call to arms against them. For, he believed – as I do, that there can be no peace with such great evil.

Nowadays, though, experts on the Holocaust are often asked why the Jews didn't resist. The fact, of course, as we have heard already tonight is that they did. They resisted with arms, they resisted with subterfuge, they resisted as individuals. They resisted with every sinew of their being.

There were dozens of uprisings in the ghettos and camps.

One of them was at Treblinka. At least 800,000 people were murdered at Treblinka Death Camp in eastern Poland between July 23, 1942 and October 19, 1943.

90 percent of all prisoners were murdered within two hours of arrival.

On August 2, 1943, the prisoners fought back. About half of the 1,500 inmates allowed to live in the camp invaded the camp armory, stole small arms and opened fire on the SS guards throughout Camp II. The prisoners seized kerosene stores and set fire to every building while the guards and watchtowers began shooting back. They broke into Camp I and armed some of its inmates, and then about 600 men and women broke through the outer perimeter and ran for their lives into the woods. All but about 40 of these were recaptured within a week and executed. Those 40 survived the war.

As Elie Wiesel put it: "there are victories of the soul and spirit. Sometimes even if you lose, you win". The resisters knew they would likely fail but preferred to die fighting nonetheless.

Individuals resisted too, doing what they could to save lives. Many are considered the Righteous Among the Nations by Israel.

One of those was Irena Sendler, an administrator in the Polish government. She was so appalled by the treatment of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto that she resolved to take individual action. Irena visited the Ghetto daily, and brought food, medicines and clothing. But 5,000 people were dying every month from starvation and disease, and Irena recognized that ultimately the Nazis planned to kill them all. So she decided to help those she could, the children, to get out.

She began smuggling children out in an ambulance. With the help of others who worked in her department, she issued hundreds of false documents with forged signatures to give them temporary new identities.

Some children were taken out in body bags. Some were buried inside loads of goods. A mechanic took a baby out in his toolbox. Some were carried out in potato sacks, others were placed in coffins.

She carefully noted, in coded form, the children's original names and their new identities. She kept the only record of their true identities in jars buried beneath an apple tree in a neighbor's back yard, across the street from German barracks, hoping she could someday dig up the jars, locate the children and inform them of their past. In all, the jars contained the names of 2,500 children.

The Nazis became aware of Irena's activities, and on October 20, 1943 she was arrested, imprisoned and tortured by the Gestapo, who broke her feet and legs. She ended up in the *Pawiak Prison*, she was the only one who knew the names and addresses of the families sheltering the Jewish children.

She withstood the torture, that crippled her for life, refusing to betray either her associates or any of the Jewish children in hiding.

Sentenced to death, Irena was saved at the last minute when co-conspirators bribed one of the Gestapo agents to halt the execution.

After the war she dug up the jars. They contained some 2,500 notes, each referring to one of the children she had helped escape. She used the notes to track down the 2,500 children she placed with adoptive families and to reunite them with relatives scattered across Europe. Most, though, had lost their families.

The children had known her only by her code name *Jolanta*. But years later, after she was honored for her wartime work, her picture appeared in a newspaper. "*A man, a painter, telephoned me,*" said Sendler, "*I remember your face,' he said. 'It was you who took me out of the ghetto.*"

Individual and collective acts of resistance that made a real difference. There are many stories like this, but also many stories of people who chose to look the other way.

The forces that give rise to genocide must be resisted. These forces start with ideologies of hatred such as anti-Semitism, discrimination, the stripping or denial of fundamental human rights, hate speech, and incitement.

They become ever more violent. They take strength when bystanders look the other way, too consumed with their own affairs to take a stand, and too enraptured by the false lure of appeasement. The fact is that it is only active resistance that can hold back the tide of genocide.

Sadly, we see the forces that give rise to genocide on the march again around the world. Anti-Semitism is rearing its ugly head in many places, including here in Brisbane. Populism is on the rise, and with it racism, hate speech, and violence. Dictators such as the brutal war criminal Bashar al-Assad commit atrocity crimes with impunity. Just this week he unleashed chemical weapons on his own people, not for the first time killing dozens of children. Once again, the world has been apathetic in its response. Meanwhile, our determination to stand up to these forces seems to be wavering and weakening. Red-lines are drawn but then broken without consequence.

To avoid repeating the horrors and mistakes of the past, we must rekindle the spirit of resistance to genocide and challenge the forces that give rise to it at their root and with renewed determination.

The responsibility to protect principle, which demands that states protect their own populations from genocide and that the international community takes action when they fail, was born out of this spirit of resistance and of recognition that we have thus far failed to deliver on the promise of never again.

Our Centre makes a modest contribution to the challenging task of implementing that principle. It is, I think, the very least that the living owe to the six million.

On behalf of the Centre and everyone here at UQ, I would like to express our sincere appreciation and thanks to Dr Bert Klug , Paul Myers, Tal Szumer Menashe , and Rabbi Levi Jaffe, as well to you all, our special guests, students, and colleagues for attending this commemoration tonight.

Thank you all, and good night.