

**Remarks to the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education,
Remembrance and Research**

Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State

Washington, D.C.

May 14, 2003

Well, Randy, thank you very much. And I am very honored by your kind introduction and for all of the hard work that you've put in to make this conference both possible, as well as productive. And of course, in this regard, I want to note the tremendous activities of Jody Manning. You've been so terrific in helping us get things done, and you've been at it for a while and I very much appreciate it. Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, as my country assumes the privilege of chairing this organization, I am delighted to assume the privilege of welcoming you here on behalf of Secretary of State Powell, as well as our President. Indeed, Secretary Powell had hoped to be among you today, but as I am sure you are well aware, he has just finished a trip in the Middle East and he is now in Russia and will continue [on] a bit of a European tour.

Allow me to single out for a warm welcome this morning our special guest and our speaker this morning, Madame Simone Veil, who lends these proceedings both stature and gravity, not only as a luminary and as a leader in Europe and around the world, but also as a witness and a survivor of the Holocaust. You grace us with your presence, Madame.

We come together this morning, ambassadors and envoys, ministers and experts, from a score of countries, large and small, spread across three continents, to put the seal of agreement on the hard work already done in the days leading up to this meeting. But what truly makes this occasion more than just another meeting is that we also have in this room the actual practitioners, the scholars and survivors, the teachers and the curators, the caretakers of our past.

But today, wherever we come from and whoever we are, we speak with one single voice. Because today, we are all activists for the cause—and that cause is memory. We are here today because memory, like any other human faculty or frailty, when it is brutalized and beaten, covers itself in scar tissue. Indeed, the mind makes its bargain with time, blurring what is too uncomfortable to remember and bleeding away what is too inconvenient to recall.

And so we go about our business. The citizens of our countries live their daily lives in as much comfort and security as we can bring them, with the wounds of our past safely, lightly sealed—just beyond the edge of our waking thoughts.

But there is a place in the middle of the 20th century that we must never be allowed to forget. It is Auschwitz. It is Nordhausen. It is Dachau. It is Natzweiler. It is the Warsaw ghetto and Treblinka. The bonfires in the streets of Berlin, where the dreams of a people were shattered to dust and charred to ash. It is the communities and towns all over Europe where a way of life ceased to exist.

There is a place in the middle of the most brutal century known to humankind where memory starts and where it must never end. And so we, all of us, stand together today and turn our hands to the task of building a shrine to that place. A shrine to memory. To the Holocaust.

But this can be no cold stone monument to sit quietly in our midst. That would not be enough. This is a warm and living memorial, one built out of education, relentless education, remembrance, and research. Education, remembrance, and research—these are the three words that define the focus of this organization and encompass its official mission.

But the truth is that there simply could not be enough words to convey the full scope of your ambitions, as well as of your achievements. Over the past five years the task force has motivated governments, making the memory of the Holocaust a matter of policy. We've seen new committees of restitution and days of commemoration and redoubled efforts to combat anti-Semitism. This task force has also mobilized our people, spurring the creation of memorials and stimulating academic research, preserving and interpreting historical sites and producing curricula for schools and for museums. You breathe life into the commitment our countries made in Stockholm to teach our people the true meaning of "never again."

Never again the totalitarian brutality that consumed Europe's Jews and millions of others. Never again the genocide that was planned and executed with scientific malice and mechanical efficiency. Never again the sweeping oppression that suborned whole societies on behalf of hatred and on behalf of death. But you have also helped us teach our people that when we say "never again," we are speaking not just of historical forces but also directly to the faces and the names of those who perished and to those who survived the Holocaust. And it is to them that we make our pledge.

We just renewed that pledge of “never again” in the United States as we marked our National Days of Remembrance. At the commemoration ceremony, Secretary Powell said, “The millions of men, women, and children who were killed in the Holocaust once had dreams for the future, each and every one of them, dreams denied. We, the living, have the power to create hope, defend freedom, and build peace.” And so as we step into this new century, “never again” must have another meaning.

The Holocaust offers many lessons, and perhaps we each take away a different legacy. Certainly for this country, for my government, there is still much to learn. Looking back, we know now that we did not do enough to prevent genocide. We did not do enough to recognize the evidence we were receiving. And we did not do enough to respond once we knew. And we know now that this failure was not the last of its kind in the 20th century.

And so today, our obligation is not only to the past, but also to the future. So I believe that the education, research and remembrance in which you are engaged is absolutely necessary for a new generation if we are to have the critical thinkers and those courageous actors who will leave a different legacy for this new century.

As a country and as a community of nations, we must fashion this legacy together through our shared values and our shared beliefs: in democracy and in the rule of law, in economic opportunity for all, and in human rights, including tolerance and religious freedom. These will be our best bulwarks against the forces of hatred and against a future that repeats the bloodstained mistakes of

the past. That is why the work of this task force to enshrine memory has such an overwhelming sense of urgency.

The Holocaust Museum here in Washington, D.C., receives some 2 million visitors each year, which is more [people] than come to see our White House. But even that considerable crowd is just a subset of those who travel through cyberspace to visit the Museum's Web site, which gets some 4.5 million hits every month. Among the pages visitors see is the story of a young GI in World War II, a name surely familiar to many, if not all of you—Kurt Klein. Klein and the soldiers he was serving with came upon a factory full of prisoners, Jewish women who had died where they fell to the floor, and others who had managed to cling with skeletal hands to survival. "Noble be man, merciful and good," one of these survivors said, pointing to the gruesome tableau. Klein was astonished to hear this young woman, barely alive, reciting from the poet Goethe.

"There was nothing that she could have said that would have underscored the grim irony of the situation better," he recalled of the woman who would later become his wife and a world famous writer. "It was a totally shattering experience for me," Klein said.

While many of us know the story of Kurt and Gerda Klein, there are hundreds of other untold stories of young American soldiers who were no less shattered by what they saw. And yet, in a sad way, they were also emboldened. They were ennobled, as well. Because in the middle of the most terrific suffering, [which] they could have never imagined and would never see again, they also saw survivors. And so that is another message the Holocaust has to deliver to a new generation with that utmost urgency. Not just the horror that man inflicts upon man, but also the hope that lives in all of us, that makes us truly and finally human, that connects us one to another, to those flickering faces

in black and white of the death camps, to the women who are today digging in the dirt of Iraq, scabbling for some scrap of cloth or length of bone. Anything—anything—that might identify a lost son or a beloved daughter, a father, a brother, or a husband. And so our responsibility as educators and government officials is also to show the resilience of the human soul—a soul that can last through death and life, and still believe in the nobility of man.

These survivors are small in numbers today, but these servants of memory have etched an indelible mark in our minds and they are, in a sense, the vital core of this task force. They are people like Ben Helfgott, whose athletic prowess is only a pale reflection of his inner strength. They are people like Simone Veil. Minister Veil has been called in her country “the conscience of government.” But her influence far exceeds that label. Indeed, she is the conscience of her whole country and of her continent and of people all over the world. In a recent interview, Minister Veil described her remarkable mother, Yvonne, who died in a Nazi concentration camp as a woman who “impressed everyone with her bearing, her self-respect and her moral strength.”

Well, I am deeply honored to introduce to you Simone Veil, who honors the memory of her mother and all those who perished in the Holocaust with her bearing, with her self-respect, and with her moral strength.

Madame Veil, thank you for joining us today and for sharing your thoughts with us.