

ZU-LAT

Equality and Human Rights

Dear Friend,

On Thursday we will mark Holocaust Remembrance Day; on Sunday we marked Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, commemorating the events that were a catalyst for the Holocaust of the Jews. “Who remembers the Armenians,” Hitler asked rhetorically. He was sure that just like the Ottoman Empire committed genocide without paying a price, so could Germany.

The Russian army is now committing crimes against humanity and genocide. As the daughter of Holocaust survivors, it is important for me to stress that there’s nothing like the human memory, and the genocide of six million Jews will forever be extraordinary in the history of genocide. The unique murder apparatus, the strict selection of the victims, the huge effort to persecute them throughout an entire continent – and the slow realization of the victims that their world had completely crashed, that every person was a potential enemy, that there was no refuge, and that they were condemned to die only because of their very existence. The fact that an entire, largely cultured, people knew, even if they repressed it, what those among them who wore a uniform had done – all of this is a bleeding wound in history. Eighty years later, historians are still trying to understand.

The historian Timothy Snyder, in his book “Bloodlands” dealt with the difficulty of understanding these inconceivable numbers in terms of a well-known incident: In the massacre at Babi Yar on the outskirts of Kyiv a young girl went over to a German photographer, pointed to herself and said: “18 years old.” After that she joined the line of victims and went to the pits. Thus, Snyder wrote, we must understand the Holocaust. Not by the figure 6,000,000, but rather by an 18-year-old girl, who knew that she was about to be murdered – 6 million times. Thus we must look at Ukraine: Not in numbers, but in thousands of worlds that are dying.

And yes, when Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy protested the terrible crimes and compared them to the Holocaust of the Jews, we all cried out. And when we cried out at the comparison, we set aside the crimes themselves.

Now even the president of the United States considers the event in Ukraine to be genocide, and the Ukrainians remember – even if we do not – that Russia already committed genocide in Ukraine – the Holodomor, which claimed three million victims and possibly more. Every day we receive news of the horrors, but the soul cannot contain them, and so we repress the information.

And after all, other things are happening here. The coalition is stumbling, violence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem has flared up, and slowly but surely, news from Ukraine is pushed aside. After all, people look out for themselves first. And we already have no strength left to read, and we say to ourselves that Ukraine is far away; it has nothing to do with us. Sometimes the war bursts into our awareness again: When the Russians murder another Holocaust survivor, when there's a bombing or starvation, there's a headline. And it sinks back down. "Never again," we will say this week. As if those words were riveted to the 1940s; as if they have no universal significance.

Genocide is happening before our very eyes, and we send the victims a few helmets, to ease our conscience. And we have interests, of course. But Switzerland and Sweden and the Vichy government also had interests, and we don't allow them any excuses. How could the world be silent, we ask. Like this, exactly like this. In the terrible overload of information, every day, slowly getting used to the horrors. More could have been expected from us. This is a moral test that we should have passed. And someday, we won't be allowed excuses either.

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Yours truly,

Zehava Galon

President of Zulat for Equality and Human Rights

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