

*Address by Ambassador of the United States of America to Latvia, Nancy Bikoff Pettit, at the dedication of the Synagogue Garden Memorial in Bauska on October 15, 2017.*

Mayor Ābelnieks, Ambassadors, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is an honor to be here with you today. I would like to extend my appreciation to the Bauska County Municipality and the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia for inviting me to take part in this ceremony.

In July 1941, this synagogue—which stood as a house of assembly and prayer for nearly a century—was burned to the ground by men consumed with a burning hatred so virulent that it engulfed the entire world in war.

As we look around the world, we are reminded that we must always remain vigilant against hate. To ensure that our children and grandchildren enjoy a secure and prosperous future, we must never forget the past.

The past is not always palatable. It is not always pretty. The memory of history can be difficult and hurtful. But we must remember. We must continually confront our history, the good and the bad. Memorials such as this one reminds us of the horrific and unspeakable events which occurred here in Bauska.

Last year, the Latvian government took an important step in righting another wrong that took place during World War II. Starting in 1940, the Soviets and then the Nazis confiscated hundreds of communal properties belonging to the Jewish Community of Latvia.

Although the Latvian state bears no responsibility for this crime, for it did not exist at the time, the government honorably signed onto the obligations of the Terezin Declaration, and last year it ensured the return of five of the several hundred communal properties.

This step sent a clear message to the Jewish Community and to the world: Latvia is confronting history and taking steps to right the wrong. We applaud the Latvian government for this important step, but also urge it to do more to meet its commitments under the Terezin Declaration.

Today's memorial is the culmination of 15 years of hard work and justice, but it is 76 years and millions of injustices in the making. We cannot resurrect this synagogue from its ashes. We cannot bring back the lives of those we've lost. We cannot heal the pain of the survivors.

But we can and must remember to ensure that such injustices never happen again. We remember. And, we build monuments like this one to honor those we lost and to serve as a guide to future generations.

I would like to close with a very short poem by Hannah Szenes called "Eli, Eli" ("My God, My God").

*My God, My God, I pray that these things never end,  
The sand and the sea,  
The rush of the waters,  
The lightning of the Heavens,  
The prayer of Man.*