

MARCH OF THE LIVING TO COMMEMORATE THE ANNHILATED WORLDS

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75 years ago, just before being marched to the gas chamber in Auschwitz, Vilma Grunvald jotted down a letter to her husband:

“My only one, dearest, we are isolated and waiting for the darkness. We considered the opportunity to hide, but decided not to since it might be hopeless. The notorious trucks are already here, and we are waiting until it begins. I am absolutely calm. My only one and dearest, do not blame yourself for what had happened, it was our destiny. We did what we could. Remain healthy and remember my words, that time will heal the wounds if not totally, then to some extent. Take care after our little golden boy and do not spoil him with your love. Stay healthy both my dearest. I will be thinking about you and Misa. Let your life be fairylike, we must enter the trucks. To Eternity. Vilma.”

This letter is preserved in Washington in the Museum of Holocaust, the USA.



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In Nazi concentration camp, in Auschwitz, in 1940-1945 more than a million of individual and indescribable worlds were annihilated, the majority of them were Jews. As it is known, in the beginning of the war, after Nazi had occupied Poland, former military quarters near Oswiecim (German: Auschwitz) were chosen to imprison Polish civilians and prisoners. In the beginning, this place stood for isolating people. As the expansion was going on, hundreds and thousands of people from Oslo to Rhode island were taken to Auschwitz. There, at the concentration camp, their personal belongings, clothes were taken away, they were given rags and instead of a name and surname they got a tatoos on the arm. A huge complex of facilities was built: people were exploited under unbearable working conditions, were starving, were exploited in murderous medical experiments. People were killed with gas and burnt in crematoriums. The third reich Minister Otto Thierack said that they had to free the German nation from Poles, Russians, Jews and Gypsies. The shortlist of the inelligible included participants of resistance, the Bible scholars, sexual minorities and many more people. Zyklon B gas was tried there for the first time in 1941. People were dying in a 20 minute period in a closed chamber. Later the death factory would kill approximately 8000 people per day. Chimneys of crematorium were smoking day and night. Even though the defeat of Germany in the war was obvious after opening the second front in 1944, extermination did not slow down. After trying to cancel relationship with Hitler and in Hungary removing the head of state regent Miklos Horthy, who was against the deportation of local residents, nearly four thousand of Jews were deported directly to Auschwitz-Birkenau gas chambers.

The war was about to end, the Soviet army was approaching Auschwitz when the Nazi decided those imprisoned to march to concentration camps in the area of Germany. Lots of people died on their way, those unable to walk were shot by escorting guards. The marching was called The Death March. After WWII, many years had to pass when the Soviet Union regime started to fall, Poland became independent, former prisoners and their family members came to visit Auschwitz. The idea to march A Living Road rather than Death was drawn in order to claim that Hitler and his followers lost as there were those who survived, new generations were born that would pass on the memory. The first Living March took place in 1988.



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The Living March is held on the Holocaust Remembrance Day (in Hebrew -*Yom Hashoah*). This day is marked not only in Israel but also in countries where large Jewish communities live, where victims of the Holocaust, heroic resistance and rescuers of Jews are commemorated. Yom Hashoah was marked in 1953 for the first time in Israel that is the official Holocaust Remembrance Day when flags are down, there is no any entertainment. At 10 o'clock sirens wail for 2 minutes in Israel and everything from traffic to people freeze.

The Living March is an international event which is annually held by the organisation The Living March working in Europe, Israel, USA. This year The Living March took place on May 2. Nearly 10 000 people from different countries were marching from Auschwitz concentration camp to Birkenau extermination camp, they demonstrated hostility to antisemitism, racism, terrorism, and xenophobia. Teachers, students, youth groups, seniors and those who support the commemoration of those annihilated



Lithuanian teachers commemorating the Living March in Auschwitz. Photo by Meile Platukiene.

This year is the first time when a group of Lithuanian teachers gathered by The Secretariat of the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania. Teachers working in Tolerance Development Centres represented Lithuania in The March. There are 145 Tolerance Development Centres in Lithuanian schools. These centres work on the issues of tolerance, historical memory and fostering common, humanistic values.

It is believed that it is easier to foster humanistic values creating appropriate conditions, to be more precise, cognition, understanding, experiencing the meaning and its appreciation, a need to realise perception, determination to seek and relevant actions to be performed. Participation in The Living March made us feel what this combination stands for.

Informal translation from Lithuanian to English

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