

Being Brave Never Goes Out Of Style

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very honoured to be here today, to be a part of this important conference on Raoul Wallenberg.

We are here because of one man and his deeds. Raoul Wallenberg's bravery is still very relevant to today's society and in this context I would like to emphasise that being brave never goes out of style.

"To me there's no other choice."

This is what Raoul Wallenberg said to his fellow diplomat, Per Anger.

"To me there's no other choice." "I have taken on this task and could never return to Stockholm without being sure that I had done everything humanly possible to save as many Jews as possible"

This was his answer when asked why he was still taking such an incredible personal risk. Per Anger never saw his friend again.

In the spring of 1944, Germany invaded Hungary, and between May and July over 400,000 Jews from Hungary were deported to death camps. The situation in Hungary was devastating.

In response to the horrific events, the United States established the War Refugee Board in order to save the Jews from deportation.

The War Refugee Board needed a representative who could lead the work in Budapest, and Raoul Wallenberg was chosen to be the leader of the Swedish legation's work in Hungary.

Raoul Wallenberg risked his own life, day in and day out, to save the lives of tens of thousands of people from the holocaust. To save people who were neither from his country nor of his religion, people he did not even know.

Who could predict that a young businessman, an architect by profession and with no diplomatic experience, would become one of the greatest pioneers of humanism and moral courage in this period of darkness in Europe?

Raoul Wallenberg came from a wealthy family who lived in a neutral country. He could have opted for a comfortable life in Sweden. But when faced with the atrocities in Hungary he made a moral choice: he acted.

In 1945 Raoul Wallenberg was taken to the Soviet Union. Throughout the years there have been various reports about his whereabouts. But sadly his fate is still unclear to us.

Our world has seen many heroes.

Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi, Mahatma Gandhi and Desmond Tutu all stood up for democracy, human rights, equality and the rule of law. Their legacies are still being honoured throughout the world. Their actions have had a profound impact on their fellow citizens. But they are also great role models to us, like Raoul Wallenberg.

But many people who have shown exceptional bravery are less well-known.

Sophie Scholl questioned and resisted the principles and policies of the Nazi regime. She was one of the more famous members of the anti-Nazi resistance movement, the White Rose/Weisse Rose in Germany during world war two.

The group decided to adopt the strategy of passive resistance. This included publishing leaflets calling for the restoration of democracy.

The group had in particular been horrified by the behaviour of the Germans on the Eastern Front where they had witnessed a group of naked Jews being shot to death.

Sophie Scholl was eventually caught by the Gestapo. In 1943 she was executed by the People's Court in Germany. She was 21 years of age.

Her last words were:

"How can we expect righteousness to prevail when there is hardly anyone willing to give himself up individually to a righteous cause? Such a fine, sunny day, and I have to go, but what does my death matter, if through us thousands of people are awakened and stirred to action?"

In 1994, while the world watched as 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed in Rwanda, Paul Rusesabagina lived through the hundred days of slaughter.

While the militia went from house to house searching for people to kill, Paul Rusesabagina hid and sheltered people in the luxury hotel he managed in Kigali.

Through creativity and also by chancing in every favour he had ever earned, he managed to keep the bloodthirsty soldiers outside the gates. By the end of the genocide he had saved more than one thousand people.

"I always call my conscience my own adviser who will never confuse right with wrong and wrong with right," Paul Rusesabagina is quoted to have said when asked where he got his strength from.

Though she knew her Serbian neighbour was spying on her, a woman called Mina risked her own safety, as well as that of her family, to hide and take care of a badly wounded Muslim man who

had escaped execution. Mina, whose four children were also in her care, said that saving the man's life had been an obvious thing to do. "Why did I save him? I knew that the same fate could strike my children, my sons, and it was totally natural to help a man in trouble. I didn't separate him from my own children", she said.

All mentioned above were confronted with a choice of principle. To act or to turn their backs. They chose the dangerous and the hard way.

What makes a person brave? What makes a person show extraordinary courage although faced with risking his or her own life? Are we born with courage or does it need to be nurtured? It is important that we remind ourselves that we can all choose to act in our everyday lives. Indifference is a dangerous state of mind.

Let us together remember Raoul Wallenberg's deeds. Let us learn from his courage. The need for the courage and humanism shown by Raoul Wallenberg is always relevant - being brave never goes out of style.

Thank you!