



We gather today to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day, this year marking the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp.

The Jewish Federation of Ottawa is privileged to partner with the National Holocaust Memorial Committee for this important and meaningful event. On behalf of the Jewish Federation of Ottawa, we thank all the survivors, dignitaries and community members for being here to participate in this solemn memorial.

We stand here together to honour the memory of the 6 million Jews who were systematically murdered during the Holocaust, and the millions of other victims of the Nazi regime. And we stand here today alongside survivors, in support of their painful losses, recognizing their strength and resilience over so many years.

Federation's Shoah-March of the Living Committee is committed to engaging community members of all ages in Holocaust education and remembrance. This past November, for Holocaust Education Month, Federation organized a tremendously successful public education initiative. In collaboration with Ottawa Public Libraries, two Yad Vashem exhibits (*Stars Without a Heaven* and *Shoah: How was it Humanly Possible?*) were on display across the city with attendance by over 400 students from the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board and hundreds of community members.

One of Federation's most impactful Holocaust-related programs is the March of the Living, an educational program for Jewish high school students. Over the course of 5 months, the Ottawa students learn about the history of Jews living in Poland and throughout Europe, the rise of antisemitism, and the ultimate genocide. They learn about the victims, the perpetrators, the bystanders, the collaborators, and the Righteous Among the Nations.

The students then embark on a journey, spending one week in Poland bearing witness to the tragedies of our past, followed by one week in Israel celebrating the survival of the Jewish people in their homeland. In Poland the students visit concentration camps (Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek, Plaszów), walk through towns that were once home to thriving Jewish communities, and enter forests concealing large mass graves.

The March of the Living students have the privilege of travelling alongside Holocaust survivors who share their painful, personal stories of loss and survival. There is a phrase quoted from the March of the Living program saying "when you listen to a witness, you become a witness." The survivors are living witnesses to the horrors of the Holocaust, and in listening to their stories, the students become witnesses themselves. As witnesses, they take on both the duty and responsibility to educate others about the Holocaust, to share their experiences, to tell the stories of survivors and make sure that their generation and future generations never forget.

Again, we stand here together to honour the memory of those who perished and those who survived the atrocities of the Holocaust. At the same time we can feel hopeful and gain comfort in the fact that through remembrance and education, our youth will become future leaders in the community, speaking out against racism, hatred and discrimination towards any individual or group of people. They will take on the responsibility to ensure that the world never forgets the atrocities of our past, and will continue to work towards a peaceful world for all.

"Whilst we can remember the past, we cannot write the future.  
Only our children, the future of our community, can do that."

Janusz Korczak