

# PM Justin Trudeau Remarks March of the Living 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala

8 May 2018, Toronto, Ontario

Thank you, Nate, for your kind introduction.

And thanks everyone gathered here at the March of the Living – This is our Legacy Gala for the warm welcome.

Before we begin, I want to say a few words about my dear friend Nate, who so bravely shared his story with countless Canadians.

He, along with other Holocaust survivors, many of who are in the room tonight, have brought one of History's darkest chapters to life, reminding us of our shared responsibility to never let such hatred take root in our homes, our schools, and societies.

To Eli Rubenstein and the organizers of tonight's event National Chair, Heshy Altbaum, Toronto Chair, Marcy Abramsky, and Dinner Chairs, Ruth Ekstein, Tammy Glied and Jennifer Green – I would like to thank you for all you do to support this important initiative.



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau welcomes Holocaust survivor Nate Leipziger at March of the Living Gala. (Photo: Ron Csillag/The CJN)

Tammy, I want to recognize the loss of your dad Bill, and salute all he did to support Holocaust education.

To Michael Levitt and Marco Mendicino – thank you for all that you do to promote and support this important initiative.

I'm honored to be given the chance to share a few words with you on this meaningful evening.

For the last 30 years, thousands of marchers have traveled to Poland to honor the memory of 6 million Jews who were brutally murdered by the Nazis.

A tribute to both the survivors and the victims of the Holocaust, the March of the Living bears witness to this strength and resilience of the Jewish community from generation to generation.

I want to commend the incredible leadership and dedication of Eli Rubenstein, who has led this March since its inception in 1988.

Through education and advocacy, he has reminded us of our collective responsibility – as Jews and as friends of the Jewish community – to ensure that NEVER AGAIN is never forgotten.

So thank you, Eli for all that you have done especially to educate our youth.



Prime Minister Trudeau and Eli Rubenstein at March of the Living Gala. (Photo: Ron Csillag/The CJN)

Being with you today, on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the March of the Living reminds me of my visit to Poland during which I visited Auschwitz with Rabbi Scheier.

That is where I first met Nate Leipziger; his experiences made my own even more emotional.

Nate's testimonial brought to the fore the evil of the Holocaust as well as the hope that springs from what seemed to be an insurmountable situation.

Together, we stared at the barbed wire fences that once separated the enslaved from their captors.

We marched along the railways that delivered so many Jews to their deaths.

We touched the railcars that took mothers, sisters, fathers, and sons away from their homes, and away from each other including Nate's family.

Together, we cried by the crematorium for all the innocent lives cut short by hatred, intolerance, racism, and anti-Semitism.

My visit to Auschwitz will forever stay with me and guide my time as Prime Minister, but also as a father, husband, son, brother, and citizen.

The heartbreaking reality of the Holocaust is one I have not lived. But hearing Nate's story and seeing the relics of this devastating chapter of History strengthened my resolve to carry on the legacy of those who had perished.

It was Elie Wiesel who said: "When you listen to a witness, you become a witness."

That day, I became a witness to Nate the same way thousands of marchers become witness to both the survivors and the victims of the Holocaust every year, for the past 30 years.

The Holocaust teaches us the power of remaining silent.

The tragic consequences of inaction brought to light the guilt of those who remained silent when confronted with injustice, discrimination and racism.

Fighting hate, intolerance and anti-semitism in all its forms is not only the responsibility of governments or members of a single faith community.

It is a shared responsibility that necessitates the efforts and commitment of all members of society regardless of their beliefs, origins or their age.

As citizens we have the responsibility to share the stories of these innocent women and men whose lives were stolen as well as guard that such atrocities never happen again.

According to the most recent figures, 17% of all hate crimes in Canada target Jewish people.

And it pains me to say that Jewish people, more than any other religious groups, are victim of hate crimes.

We need to do more, as a society, to end xenophobic and anti-Semitic attitudes that still take root in our communities, in our schools, and in our places of work.

One of the things I find so inspiring about

the March is its commitment to education, which permeates everything you do.

When I learned that you would be announcing scholarships that bear the names of survivors, I couldn't help but think there was no better tribute to their legacy.

After all, education is our most powerful tool against the ignorance and hatred that fueled the Holocaust.

And I am proud to say that our government shares your commitment to the importance of holocaust education.

I would like to recognize the countless contributions the survivors and their families have made to the Jewish community and our national fabric.

I stand here on May 8 – Canada's inaugural marking of Jewish Heritage Month, which was passed last April in the House of Commons.

But as a country, we learn our successes in tandem with our failures.

Between 1933 and 1945, the Canadian government only accepted around 5,000 Jewish refugees, due to our discriminatory "none is too many" immigration policy of the time.



Nate Leipziger embracing Prime Minister Trudeau in Auschwitz-Birkenau. (Photo: Pawel Sawicki, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum)



The MS St. Louis ship



Jews on the St. Louis were forced back to Europe.

A most egregious example of this misguided policy happened in 1939, when Canada turned away the MS Saint Louis.

The Canadian government infamously turned its back on 907 German Jews who were fleeing persecution.

Forced to return to Europe, 254 were eventually killed in the Holocaust.

We cannot turn away from this uncomfortable truth, and Canada's part in it.

We must learn from this story, and let its lessons guide our actions going forward.

That is why I am proud to announce that the Government of Canada will issue a formal apology over the fate of the MS St. Louis and its passengers.

That is why I am proud to announce that the Government of Canada will present an official apology for what happened to the MS St. Louis and its passengers.

When we cruelly denied entry to Canada of this ship, we not only abandoned its passengers but their descendants and their community.

We were not able to show the kindness and compassion they deserved.

Now, an apology in the House of Commons will not rewrite this shameful chapter of our History.

It will not bring back those who perished or repair the lives shattered by tragedy.

But it is our hope that this long overdue apology will bring awareness to our failings, as we vow to never let History repeat itself.

I look forward to offering this apology on the floor of the House.

Once again, thank you all for the warm welcome and for all that you do for this community and this country.

Thank you very much everyone.



Images from the Gala.