

Last January, the United Nations commemorated the 60th anniversary of the day on which the allied troops arrived at the doors of the Auschwitz concentration camp to evidence the horror that the cruel persecution and extermination unleashed by the Nazi meant for the Jewish People at the end of the 30's.

Death camps, torture, annihilation, desolation in the name of race and of an alleged scientific notion; but also fields of heroism, resolve, selflessness and faith in convictions.

When the terror of Nazism befell the Jewish communities of Europe, a meeting of nations was convened at Evian-les-Bains to discuss the issue of political refugees and people persecuted by reason of race or creed.

The world then, according to the words of Hayim Weitzman, was divided in two groups: "one formed by countries that expel the Jews and another by those that refuse to admit them." The Dominican Republic was the exception. The Dominican delegate to the conference at Evian announced that the country was willing to accept up to 100,000 Jewish immigrants.

Thanks to this decision, the Dominican Republic issued around five thousand visas to Jewish people; however, due to bureaucratic difficulties at the countries of origin and in-transit nations, only 600 people were able to reach our land to settle in the northern region, in a town called *Sosúa*.

In this remote and depopulated spot of the Dominican Republic, the Jewish settlers, -mostly young people of urban extraction, with very little or no farming experience- the majority of which were all tragically separated from their families, made of *Sosúa* a self-sufficient and ultimately thriving colony. They built their own aqueduct and sanitation system, erected housing units, opened a clinic, pharmacy, school, library, synagogue, theater, newspaper, stores, a commercial bank and engaged in manufacturing butter, cheese and sausages which were marketed nationwide.

Today, sixty five years later, *Sosúa* has become one of the major tourist attractions in the Caribbean, yet visitors can still see the houses built by these industrious settlers. The synagogue still remains, and within, the museum inaugurated in memory of these men and women who instilled in Dominicans their enthusiasm and industriousness, and culturally and economically enriched the country and its people.

This was not the first time that the Dominican people showed their sympathy towards the Jewish people. On January 27, 1882, General Gregorio Luperón, the most renowned military figure of the 1861 war against the Spanish wrote to the Universal Israelite Alliance of the era, on account of the programs in Russia: “the Dominican Republic wants to become a sanctuary for those suffering from persecution throughout the world.”

This long road of solidarity prompted the Dominican Republic to vote in favor of the creation of a Jewish State at the 1948 United Nations General Assembly, and to establish full diplomatic relations with the State of Israel

one year later. Since then, the ties between the two States have been strengthened, especially in the area of trade and the cooperation programs which Israel has offered our country.

Today, we attend with emotion the re-inauguration of *Yad Vashem*, a museum that meets the imperative of speaking for all of those who were silenced, an eloquent witness of what transpired in the death and annihilation camps, as a categorical expression of the memory that must be upheld in serving to support the construction of the future.

Never again shall humanity accept such ignominies as the holocaust. Never again shall present and future generations forget the degradation brought about by the fanaticism of human beings. Ever present in our minds must we keep the memory of the torture, anguish and despair of those confined to Dachau, Treblinka, Auschwitz, Bikernau; the burning of sacred books, the night of the broken crystals; the overcrowding in shameful ghettos and the indignity; the trains of death and the crematories of viciousness, perversion and impiety.

On behalf of the Dominican people, its government, its President, Dr. Leonel Fernández Reyna; and myself, we salute the government of the State of Israel and its people; and we earnestly hope that the recent conversations may bear fruit and enable peace to reign definitively among the descendants of Abraham.

Jerusalem, March 16, 2005