

Speech for UNHRD

Good evening.

My name is Emma.

Last year, both Rebecca and I, together with thousands of others, embarked on the journey of a lifetime - the annual March of the Living programme, with its 3-kilometre walk from Auschwitz to Birkenau ... a silent tribute to all victims of the Holocaust.

The March of the Living programme, which took us to Poland and then Israel, is joined each year by thousands of Jewish teens, adults and Holocaust survivors from around the world, along with many people from diverse faiths and backgrounds. Students whose communities have experienced historic persecutions also participate, among them survivors of the Rwandan genocide and other victims of discrimination.

For us, the March of the Living programme was not merely a “journey of a lifetime”; we came to understand that it was rather a journey FOR a lifetime – a unique, unforgettable and transformative experience.

The first week of the programme was spent in Poland, paying tribute at sites where millions of our brothers and sisters, and others, perished during the Holocaust. These experiences left us dealing with a range of conflicting emotions.

One day in particular, the day we marched with countless others from Auschwitz 1 to Birkenau, was especially emotionally confronting. I remember walking, arms linked with my fellow marchers and being numb to the whole experience. As we came closer to the infamous gates of Auschwitz, our sense of sadness, grief and anger - strangely enough - was overwhelmed by a feeling of tremendous pride.

Here we were at Auschwitz-Birkenau, the place where over a million innocents were murdered – and yet fifteen thousand Jews were marching with heads held high through the camp, singing *Hatikvah*, the anthem of our people and of Israel, the Jewish state reborn in the wake of the Holocaust, proudly affirming our Jewish identity and transforming that place of death into a place of life.

Arim Roshi, the song we are about to sing, is very close to our hearts, as we sang it on March of the Living at a children’s home in Israel during the annual *Yom Hazikaron* ceremony – a commemoration to honour Israel’s fallen. The song’s title translates to “I will raise my head” and is sung as a symbol of hope when times seem unbelievably harsh and unfair.

The song speaks about loss of identity and the search for a ray of light to help end pain and bring hope. Although not written about the Holocaust, the song echoes the abject sentiments of helplessness and loneliness which characterised that dark period of history. Yet, *Arim Roshi* is not a depressing song. Rather, it is a song of hope, encouraging the oppressed to raise their heads toward a better tomorrow, and to leave the hardships of the past behind.
