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## The Raoul Wallenberg Research Initiative RWI-70

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2-2022 March 7, 2022

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

The events of the last two weeks undoubtedly have shaken all of us to the core. Probably none of us have slept well in days.

War is hell: The apocalyptic images of destruction, with millions of people fleeing for their lives, resurrect memories of the violence and crimes we had hoped never to see again in Europe. Like most people, I feel a mixture of shock, helplessness, pain, outrage, and plain fear. **Since I am unable to comment here, under the aegis of the RWI-70, in detail on the current crisis in Ukraine, I will release a separate statement on the conflict that reflects strictly my personal views.**

I am sure in recent days we have all turned our thoughts to other recent mass atrocities, like the genocide in Rwanda, where in 1994 members of the ethnic Hutu majority slaughtered 800,000 people, most belonging to the Tutsi minority; the 1995 mass executions of 8,000 Muslim boys and men in Srebrenica (Bosnia); as well as the Chinese government current efforts to wipe out its minority Uyghur community in the most cruel way; and to World War II, to the massacres of Babyn Yar, when German Nazi forces in two days executed almost 34,000 Ukrainian Jews, and Katyn, where Soviet authorities ordered the execution of close to 22,000 Polish officers. And of course, I also think back to Hungary, where in 1944 the country's Jewish population faced a similar barbarity. 500,000 of the country's Jewish citizens were deported and murdered in a period of just six months. Desperate appeals to bomb the railway lines to Auschwitz fell on deaf ears.

Words fail to express the horror. And yet, in this darkest hour, when any hope seemed elusive, a young Swedish businessman left behind his comfortable life in Stockholm to jump right into the fray. Wallenberg must have felt desperate, discouraged and afraid countless times, and yet he followed an almost reflexive impulse to come to the aid of his fellow human beings. With his humanistic spirit, fierce determination, and extraordinary courage – both physical and moral – Wallenberg came to represent what is best in us. Most importantly, he demonstrated the power of hope and possibility: that one person *can* indeed make a difference.

Professor Irwin Cotler, a former Minister of Justice of Canada and international director of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights (RWCHR) in Montreal, summarized these universal lessons of the Holocaust and Wallenberg's mission in a memorable op-ed article this past January, emphasizing that Wallenberg's actions laid the foundation for modern day

international human rights and humanitarian law. You will find his text enclosed at the end of this circular. It will both comfort and inspire you.

Below I have put together a few items that cover the spectrum from providing relief to Ukraine's civilian population, to seeking accountability and justice for the crimes committed. At the same time, let us not lose sight of the other serious human rights challenges around the world. Other autocrats will try to use the focus on Ukraine to crack down even harder on internal dissent and to shore up their regimes. Democratic values and the humanistic spirit are indestructible, but we are paying a very, very high price. May we never take them for granted again.

I will report on various research news regarding Sweden in the coming days.

I leave you with the international anthem to mutual love and understanding, from [Beethoven's 9th Symphony](#), "Alle Menschen werden Brüder ..." which also happens to be [the official anthem of a united and democratic Europe](#).

Today, I wish us all one thing only – Peace.

Susanne Berger

Coordinator

**THE RWI-70**

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**@RazomForUkraine - TogetherForUkraine**



For a list of relief organizations and agencies see <https://linktr.ee/RazomForUkraine>

Another list recommended by Timothy Snyder

[https://snyder.substack.com/p/a-few-ways-to-help-ukrainians?s=w&fbclid=IwAR2zw-RjVlon5soM4Tg\\_KVYqM8dCbVG3aCfXNpfveUPcBLu33U5KKE7iEvg](https://snyder.substack.com/p/a-few-ways-to-help-ukrainians?s=w&fbclid=IwAR2zw-RjVlon5soM4Tg_KVYqM8dCbVG3aCfXNpfveUPcBLu33U5KKE7iEvg)

It is difficult to make a recommendation among these groups, but there appears to be general consensus that *Come Back Alive* is very well run and effective.

For other forms of fundraising and donations, see also

[https://www.cnn.com/style/article/ukrinedao-pussy-riot-nft-flag-war-fundraising/index.html](https://www.cnn.com/style/article/ukrainedao-pussy-riot-nft-flag-war-fundraising/index.html)

PLEASE NOTE that there are numerous fake websites and fraudulent actors operating online, so please use extra caution when making your selections.

**The [RWI-70 joins appeal by Justice Info](#) and 60+ international human rights organizations for more resources for the International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation in Ukraine**



Highway directional sign in Ukraine. All roads lead to The Hague.  
Source: Twitter

In this urgent appeal, organized by Justice Info, civil society organizations from Ukraine, Russia and Belarus and their international partners welcome the launch of the International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation in Ukraine triggered by an unprecedented collective referral by 39

State parties. The signatories call on the international community to provide a substantial injection of funding for the ICC and organizations supporting this process.

“The international community has shown willingness to punish the Kremlin and its enablers for this war of aggression, now it must invest in justice to identify and punish those responsible for war crimes.”

The Elders, a group of former world leaders founded by Nelson Mandela, also called for [an international tribunal](#) “to investigate alleged crime of aggression in Ukraine”

[Mary Robinson](#), Chair of The Elders, and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, wrote:

“Failure to hold President Putin accountable for his aggression against Ukraine will further undermine the rules-based international order. If we allow crimes of aggression to go unchallenged, we are likely to see further violations, and a continuing breakdown of the peace and security the UN was set up to protect. The international community must explore all options available to ensure accountability and justice.”

### **Meanwhile, in Moscow ...**



Source: Twitter

## Russia's Supreme Court upholds decision to shut down *Memorial*



Protestors displaying a sign “Wir oppose the closure of Memorial”. Source:Deutsche Welle

As expected, Russia’s Supreme Court has upheld the decision [to shutter the International Memorial Society](#). It is a tragic loss. Members of Memorial were not permitted to attend the court hearing and later, [its premises were searched](#). It is unclear what will now happen to Memorial’s invaluable historical archive.

## In a landmark decision, Russian researcher Sergei Prudovsky loses appeal to release names of NKVD officers who served as executioners during the 1930s



Sergei Prudovsky. Source: <https://dmitrievaffair.com/2021/12/08/sergei-prudovsky-v-fsb/>

On March 1, 2022, the Board of Appeals of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation denied the request made by the researcher Sergei Prudovsky to invalidate paragraphs 84 and 91 of the "List of information classified as state secrets", on the basis of which the FSB hid under the designation "Secret" the rank, title, names and signatures of NKVD officers who participated in the execution of Soviet citizens during the 1930s. As [Novaya Gazeta reports](#), the court's decision essentially marks the end of efforts to declassify historical records concerning the state's role in mass atrocities committed in the years of the Great Terror, more than 80 years ago.

"The appeal decision in an ordinary administrative case, which went almost unnoticed against the backdrop of events currently shaking the world, is in fact quite indicative. It puts an end to attempts to declassify the archives of the NKVD in Russia. This is the highest authority - there is nowhere else to go, except for international courts, the verdicts of which, as we remember, are no longer always binding on the territory of the Russian Federation. It also makes quite obvious the moral priorities of the state and the symbols by which it is guided. And which are ominously reflected today."

*Novaya Gazeta* stresses that the information should be made available, based on the Russian law "On the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repressions". "The Federal Law directly obliges government agencies to publish information about those found guilty of falsifying cases," the publication states," about the use of illegal methods of investigation, and crimes against justice."

The Supreme Court ruling is based on a new and broader interpretation of the 1993 "Law on State Secrets". As *Novaya Gazeta* point out,

"The same law, however, does not allow classifying information about violations of the law by state authorities and their officials. And, in any case - what does the NKVD have to do with modern counterintelligence?"

The decision obviously has serious implications for the Raoul Wallenberg case. His family should be permitted, under the law of rehabilitation, to access all documentation related to his fate in Russian archives.

**#Animatorsagainstwar**

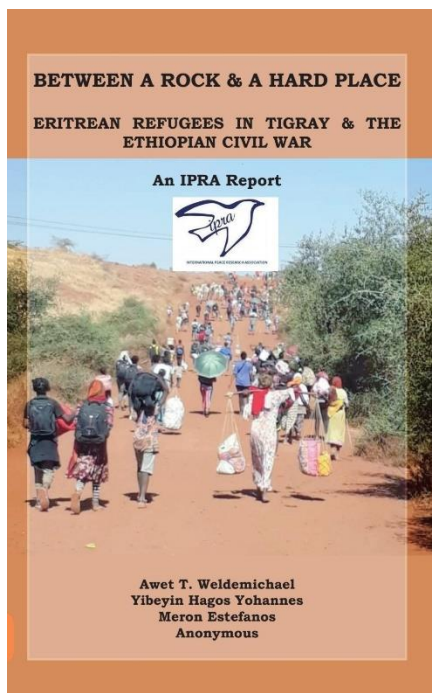
The logo features the text "#ANIMATORS AGAINSTWAR" in a stylized, hand-drawn font. The word "ANIMATORS" is in blue and "AGAINSTWAR" is in orange. The hashtag symbol is also in blue. The text is set against a light blue background with a subtle white glow effect.

With a compilation of digital illustrations, a group of 100 f [Russian animators](#), sound designers and musicians show their opposition to the war in Ukraine

“We believe peaceful methods are the only answer in resolving any conflicts between countries. Everything that is happening right now in Ukraine is a horrible tragedy. There is no way to justify this terror the war has brought to peaceful Ukrainian people on our behalf. We urge to stop all the military action against Ukraine immediately! We demand Peace! We demand respect for the territorial integrity of Ukraine! We demand respect for human life in every country of the world!” [#animatorsagainstwar](#)

## Recommended reading

### New Report on Eritrean refugees in Tigray and the Ethiopian civil war



[In this report by the International Peace Research Association \(IPRA\)](#) experts Awet T. Weldemichael (awet.weldemichael@queensu.ca), Meron Estefanos (@meronina), Yibeyin Hagos Yohannes ([yibeyinh@gmail.com](mailto:yibeyinh@gmail.com)) and an anonymous contributor document the severe human rights abuses suffered by Eritrean refugees in Tigray and in the Ethiopian civil war. The 88 -pages long study also includes a set of recommendations how to mitigate the suffering in the near term.

## Raoul Wallenberg's Humanitarian Mission to Hungary in 1944 – a Precursor of the Foundational Principles of International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law

*Irwin Cotler*



The subsequent text was released on January 17, 2022, to commemorate Raoul Wallenberg's detention by Soviet military counterintelligence in Budapest. A slightly different version was released on January 27, 2022, Holocaust Remembrance Day.

*"We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor never the victim, silence encourages the tormentor never the tormented . . . wherever men or women are persecuted because of their race, religion or political views that place must—at that moment—become the center of the universe."*

Elie Wiesel

I write in the wake of the 77th Anniversary of the arrest and disappearance of Raoul Wallenberg on January 17th, 1945 – Canada's first Honorary Citizen, and an Honorary Citizen of the U.S., Australia, Hungary and Israel. Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat who protected some 100,000 Jews in the last six months of 1944 alone – more than any other single government or organization – demonstrated how one person with the compassion to care and courage to act can confront evil, prevail, and transform history. It remains a tragedy that this hero of the Holocaust who saved so many was not saved by so many who could. We, the countries of Raoul Wallenberg's honorary citizenship, owe him, his family, and all those saved by this Hero of Humanity a duty to secure truth and justice.

I write also amidst the international drumbeat of evil including the mass atrocities targeting the Uyghurs, Rohingya, Afghans, and Africans; the increasing assaults on the rules-based order by Russia and China, involving Russia's threatening moves re Ukraine, and China's intensified assaults on democracy and media freedom in Hong Kong and elsewhere; the Iranian regime's intensification of its domestic



repression, [...] the increasing imprisonment of human rights defenders and the culture of impunity accompanying it – the whole amidst an ongoing international bystander community. We need to learn from, and act, upon Raoul Wallenberg’s heroic life and legacy if we are to build just and accountable societies. And I write also amidst a global resurgence of antisemitic incitement, violence, and terror.

As we say at these moments of remembrance, “Unto each person there is a name, each person has an identity, each person is a universe.” As the Talmud reminds us, “Whoever saves a single life, it is as if he or she has saved an entire universe.” Thus, the abiding universal imperative: we are each, wherever we are, the guarantors of each other’s destiny.

In transforming history and saving human “universes,” Raoul Wallenberg may be said to have presaged today’s foundational principles of international human rights and humanitarian law: In distributing “Schutzpasses”, official passports conferring protective immunity, and establishing safe houses conferring diplomatic sanctuary, Wallenberg is credited with saving 50,000 Jews. His heroic deeds affirmed and validated the principle of diplomatic immunity, the remedy of diplomatic protection, a foundational principle of international law and model of the diplomatic capacity to save lives. In his organization of hospitals, soup kitchens, orphanages, the staples of international humanitarian assistance that provided women, children, the sick and the elderly with a semblance of dignity in the face of the worst of all horrors and evils, Wallenberg symbolized the best of what we today call international humanitarian intervention.

In his protection of civilians amid the horrors of the Holocaust - rescuing Jews about to be deported to the death camps and others from death marches - he manifested the best of what we today call international humanitarian law. Indeed, in saving Jews from certain death, deportation, and atrocity, he symbolized what we today call *the Responsibility to Protect doctrine*. Finally, Wallenberg’s last rescue was perhaps his most memorable. As the Nazis advanced on Budapest and threatened to blow up the city’s ghetto and liquidate the remaining Jews, he put the Nazi generals on notice that they would be held accountable and brought to justice, if not executed, for their war crimes and crimes against humanity. The generals desisted. Some 70,000 more Jews were saved, thanks to the indomitable courage of one person prepared to confront radical evil. In warning the Nazi officials that they would be held responsible for their war crimes, Wallenberg was a forerunner of the Nuremberg principles and what today we call international criminal law. Wallenberg’s heroism embodied and symbolized the universal lessons of the Holocaust with their contemporary international resonance and importance:

**Lesson one: The dangers of forgetting – the responsibility to remember.** Wallenberg’s heroism reminds us of the danger of forgetting – of the killing of the victims a second time – and the imperative of remembrance – *zachor* – *le devoir de mémoire*. The Holocaust, as Professor Elie Wiesel would remind us again and again, was “a war against the Jews, in which not all victims were Jews, but all Jews were targeted victims”. As we remember the victims of the Shoah – defamed, demonized, and dehumanized as prologue and justification for genocide – we must understand that the mass murder of six million Jews and millions of non-Jews is not a matter of abstract statistics. As the Czech novelist Milan Kundera put it, “the struggle of memory against forgetting, is a struggle of liberty against tyranny”. He might well have been speaking of Raoul Wallenberg.

**Lesson two: The dangers of racism and Antisemitism amid a global resurgence of this oldest and most enduring of hatreds – and our individual and collective responsibilities to confront and combat them.** The second lesson is the danger of antisemitism – the oldest and most enduring of hatreds – and the

most lethal. If the Holocaust is a paradigm for radical evil, antisemitism is a paradigm for radical hatred. Let there be no mistake about it: Jews were murdered at Auschwitz because of antisemitism, but antisemitism did not die there. It remains the bloody canary in the mineshaft of global evil today. And as we have learned only too painfully, and all too well, while antisemitism begins with Jews, it doesn't end with Jews. As Ahmed Shaheed, the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion and Belief phrased it in his report to the United Nations, antisemitism is a threat not only to Jews but to our common humanity, as Wallenberg understood only too well. [...] There are reasons to feel concerned and alarmed. Now is the time to mobilize the efforts of all of humanity", where are the Wiesels and Wallenbergs of today?

**Lesson three: The danger of silence in the face of evil – the imperative of standing up against injustice.**

Raoul Wallenberg's incredible heroism exemplifies for us the importance of speaking up – and standing up – against injustice. He acted upon the words by Elie Wiesel in his 1986 Nobel Prize lecture: "We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor never the victim, silence encourages the tormentor never the tormented . . . wherever men or women are persecuted because of their race, religion or political views that place must—at that moment—become the center of the universe."

**Lesson four: The dangers of state-sanctioned cultures of hate and incitement – the responsibility to prevent.**

The fourth enduring lesson is that the genocide of European Jewry – like the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda where 10,000 Tutsis were murdered every day for three months – succeeded not only because of the machinery of death, but because of a state-sanctioned ideology of hate. This teaching of contempt, this demonizing of the other is where it all begins. For example, the Jew was seen as the personification of the devil, as the enemy of humankind, and humanity could only be redeemed by the death of the Jew. As the Canadian Supreme Court affirmed – and as echoed by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda – "the Holocaust did not begin in the gas chambers – it began with words." Indeed, in another important principle and precedent, the Supreme Court held that the very incitement to genocide constitutes the crime in and of itself, whether or not acts of genocide follow.

**Lesson five: The Dangers of Indifference and Inaction – The Responsibility to Act.**

The fifth painful and poignant lesson, which Raoul Wallenberg's courageous heroism so compellingly represents, is that these Holocaust crimes, like the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda, resulted not only from state-sanctioned incitement to hatred and genocide, but from crimes of indifference, from conspiracies of silence.

Indeed, what makes the Holocaust and the genocide of the Tutsis so unspeakable is not only the horror of the crimes, but that these crimes were preventable. No one can say that we did not know; we knew, but we did not act – just as in Darfur we knew and did not act, with the Rohingya we knew and did not act, and most recently with the mass atrocities targeting the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang region of China we know and are still not acting – with the international community more as bystander than exhibiting the singular heroism mandated by Wallenberg. Again, indifference and inaction always mean coming down on the side of the victimizer, never the victim.

**Lesson six: The Responsibility to Prevent and Protect.**

Ten years ago in March 2011, a group of young people in Daraa, Syria, marched with olive branches chanting "Peace, Peace, Dignity, Dignity". They were gunned down by the Assad regime; the group that came to replace them suffered a similar tragic fate. At the end of 2011, as I wrote at the time, there were "some 7000 dead, and thousands of others imprisoned, tortured, and disappeared". Today, as we mark the 10th anniversary of this peaceful protest – one of the early manifestations of the "Arab Spring" in Syria – we are witness to over 600,000 dead, more than half of Syria's civilian population displaced and dispossessed – and over 5 million Syrian refugees. For 10 years, the international community dithered and delayed – UN Security Council

resolutions were vetoed and ignored, humanitarian aid missions were impeded and assaulted, and the brave Syrian “White Helmets” targeted and killed. Let there be no mistake about it: in the face of evil, indifference is acquiescence, if not complicity in evil itself. In this regard, Responsibility to Protect (R2P) must be a clarion call for us all.

**Lesson Seven: The Dangers of Impunity: The Responsibility to Bring War Criminals to Justice.** If the last century – symbolized by the Holocaust – was the age of atrocity, it was also the age of impunity. Few of the perpetrators were brought to justice. We are reminded here of Wallenberg’s bravado and bluff in warning the Nazi generals about to extinguish the Budapest Ghetto that they would stand trial for their crimes, resulting in their desisting from their criminality. And so, just as there must be no sanctuary for hate, no refuge for bigotry, there must be no base or sanctuary for these enemies of humankind, as Wallenberg understood. The purpose of Nuremberg - and international tribunals established since - was to deter mass atrocity, to protect the victims, to prosecute the perpetrators. Regrettably, the credibility of these tribunals has been undermined by their sometimes failure to bring perpetrators to justice or their selective use of justice. Even the Nuremberg trials were themselves critiqued for “selective justice” in that few of the perpetrators were put on trial, with the selective prosecution serving to whitewash the others. But as Elie Wiesel would remind us—the power of the Nuremberg Tribunal - not unlike the International Criminal Tribunals for former Yugoslavia and Rwanda - lies also in the bearing of witness. Indeed, it lies in the affirmation of memory - of fidelity to truth - in the “triumph of memory” and where memory allowed justice to be served.

**Lesson Eight: The Dangers of the Betrayal of the Elites – and the Responsibility to Speak Truth to Power.** The eighth lesson is that the Holocaust was made possible not only because of the “bureaucratization of genocide,” as Robert Lifton put it, and as the Nazi desk murderer Adolf Eichmann himself personified. Eichmann would refer to Wallenberg as the “Judenhund Wallenberg” (the “Jewish Dog”), to the Holocaust survivors Wallenberg was “the Guardian Angel”. It is this “Trahison des Clercs”, “the betrayal of the elites”, as Ernest Renan put it, “that took us down the road to genocide”. Accordingly, as Elie Wiesel reminded us: “It is our responsibility to confront evil, as Raoul Wallenberg did, to resist it, to expose it—particularly when evil masks itself under the cover of law - where the Nazis under cover of law committed mass murder, aided and abetted by Nuremberg elites - doctors, lawyers, judges, educators, engineers, architects and the like”. This double entendre of Nuremberg - of Nuremberg Racism and the Nuremberg Principles - must be part of our learning as it is part of Wallenberg’s legacy. Nuremberg crimes, then, were also the crimes of the Nuremberg elites. It is our responsibility as Wallenberg demonstrated again and again, to speak truth to power, to hold power accountable to truth.

**Lesson Nine: The vulnerability of the powerless and the powerlessness of the vulnerable – the protection of the vulnerable as the test of a just society.** And so, it is our responsibility - as Raoul Wallenberg demonstrated in his good deeds, whether we be government representatives or *citoyen du monde* - to give voice to the voiceless, as we seek to empower the powerless - be they the disabled, the poor, the refugee, the elderly, the women victims of violence, the vulnerable child - whoever and wherever they may be. As my daughter Gila put it, at 15 years of age: “Daddy, if you want to know what the test of human rights is, always ask yourself at any time, in any situation, in any part of the world, is it good for children? Is what is happening good for children?”. For Wallenberg, saving children was a supreme duty.

**Lesson Ten: One person can make a difference - The Inaugural Raoul Wallenberg Lectureship in Human Rights: “Elie Wiesel Bearing Witness”.** Professor Elie Wiesel inaugurated the Raoul Wallenberg Lectureship in Human Rights at a Conference on “Nuremberg 40 Years Later: The Struggle Against Injustice in our Time” held at McGill University in November 1987. I am including here a small excerpt from his searing testimony whose backdrop was “how one person with integrity can make a difference”:

How can you bear witness when the memory has attained such a dimension that it is broken down by language? No word will ever contain the silence of one child, when that child went to the nocturnal flames. No word can contain the prayer of an old man who, hand in hand with his grandchild, stepped forward to the mass grave. No word can contain the anguish that preceded a selection in a concentration camp. No word can ever contain the fear that descended on a ghetto at certain times, at certain moments. [..]”

But then, always, the call to action, in Elie’s words:

“[T]here’s much to be done, there’s much that can be done. One person - Raoul Wallenberg - one person of integrity, can make a difference, a difference of life and death. As long as one dissident is in prison, our freedom will not be true. As long as one child is hungry, our lives will be filled with anguish and shame. What all these victims need above all is to know that they are not alone; that we are not forgetting them, that when their voices are stifled we shall lend them ours, that while their freedom depends on ours, the quality of our freedom depends on theirs.”

As Wallenberg’s heroism reminds us, we must never be bystanders to injustice, never be indifferent to human suffering, never be silent in the face of evil, never abandon the victim to stand alone. It is this that inspired the founding of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights – where Elie Wiesel was our Honorary Chair – and where the Centre’s agenda is anchored in, and inspired by, the courage and commitment of the person whom the UN called the “greatest humanitarian of the 20th century”, Raoul Wallenberg.

[A shorter version of this text](#) was published on January 17, 2020, in *Haaretz*.

*Irwin Cotler* is a former Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada. He is the founder and international director of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights ([RWCHR](#)). He also serves as Canada’s Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism.