

His Honor the Mayor, the venerable Chief Rabbi, dear friends, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

70 years have passed since the vicious massacre perpetrated by residents of this city against their Jewish neighbors – children, youth, women and men, refugees from the Holocaust and survivors of the extermination camps – innocent victims whose blood cries out ever louder with every passing year.

For decades now, the Kielce pogrom has been the subject of innumerable articles, books, studies, investigations, inquiry committees of various types, films, radio and television programs, discussions and disputes, some bitter and emotionally charged, and recently also demonstrations. It seems that everyone is trying to understand and ascertain exactly what happened on that terrible day, how it happened, why it happened, and, especially, who is or is not to blame.

On the other hand, there are those of us who engage in drawing the necessary conclusions, in teaching global tolerance, respect and dignity, in preserving the memory and in searching for ways to “repair the world”, for “Tikun Olam”, to promote reconciliation and build bridges between our peoples.

However, what is very conspicuous is how little discussion there is, if any, of the victims themselves. Who were these people? Where were they from and from which families? What are the stories of their lives? And what were their plans and dreams, that were shattered on that bitter day by the murderers? For some of the victims, we don't even know their first names - just Wajnberg, Wundeler, Kos, Rabindorf, Szulmanovicz, and one anonymous victim, about whom all that is known – despite all attempts to identify him – is the number B.2969 that was branded on his arm by the Nazis in the Auschwitz extermination camp, where he arrived on a transport from Kielce on August 2, 1944.

And perhaps it is no surprise that so little is known about them, because the victims of the pogrom – like the other Jews who came to Kielce at the end of the war – were lonely, solitary people, lone survivors who had lost their loved ones and their friends in the ghastly Holocaust and who sought new friends with whom they could build and share their future.

Most of them hadn't known each other beforehand, and those who survived the pogrom focused mainly on their personal survival in the years that followed, and

on attempts to rebuild their lives and to build their new homeland, the State of Israel.

Among those wounded in the pogrom was Raphael Blumenfeld, a native of Kielce, who was the teacher and educator of a group of 35 young men and women of the Kibbutz "Ichud" that was housed on the third floor of the building at 7 Planty Street. Decades passed before Raphael was able to write his memoirs and life story, which included a description of that group of young men and women, five of whom were murdered during the pogrom. And so he wrote:

"These members of the Kibbutz were a very interesting group of youth. They all came from Kielce and the surrounding towns. Each one had a fascinating life story. They all shared one common life experience: they were all fighting to survive, after managing to live through years of hardship, suffering and constant perils of impending death.

I see them now as if for the first time: **Belka Gertner** from Ostrowiec, a beautiful, intelligent 16-year-old girl who was the lone survivor of her entire family, who were murdered during the Holocaust. Her brother, Abek Gertner, was one of the brave fighters who fell during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

Bella was a shy, introverted adolescent, always pensive who, nevertheless, was very interested in the social activities of the Kibbutz, and her participation in those activities was very prominent.

She loves to write poems and rhymes, but is shy about showing them to others. She is trying to rebuild her world that was destroyed; she is very active on the Kibbutz's culture committee, mainly editing the placard newsletter – work that she particularly enjoys. And, indeed, a new edition is posted weekly, containing the members' opinions and impressions about what's going on around them. The newsletter is published in three languages: Yiddish, Hebrew and Polish. Here, Bella sits among us and dreams of emigrating to the Land of Israel – where Abek, her hero brother had dreamed of going. And despite the pleadings of her relatives in Toronto, she refuses to join them and says she does not want to try living a life of exile and alienation ever again.

She was very talented, this beautiful young girl, who dreamed of the day she would emigrate with the members of her Kibbutz to the Land of Israel. But her dream was

never fulfilled. She was brutally robbed and murdered by a barbaric, anti-Semitic, bloodthirsty mob in this satanic city of Kielce.

"**Rochale Zondberg** – daughter of the rabbi of the village of Olkusz – came to our Kibbutz after being liberated from the concentration camp where she had been and where she had lost her entire family. She was the youngest child of the Kibbutz, and everyone took care of her lovingly. She has amazing insight. She tells us about her naïve dreams in which she yearns for the day when we leave the valley of death, and be rid, once and for all, of the hostile looks and the hatred that besets us constantly whenever we leave the house. Her dreams were never fulfilled. The evil murderers extinguished her young life during the pogrom that broke out two months after she came to us. After she had managed to survive Hitler's murders, the life of this intelligent, wise Jewish girl was abruptly snuffed out by the Polish murderers after the war had ended.

"**Yechiel Simcha Sokolowski** – a native of Kielce, Simcha was an industrious young man who had managed to hide in the dense forests near the city. He fought among the ranks of the PAL partisans, and many times risked death at the hands of members of the NSZ Polish national partisans, who murdered Jews who had managed to evade the Germans by hiding in the forests.

Simcha was a member of the "Zionist Youth" before the war, and had planned to depart for Hakhshara [training for life in Israel], but the war interrupted all of his plans. When the war ended, he naturally joined our Kibbutz and become one of its most active members. He focused mainly on arranging outside work for the Kibbutz's members, as he was very familiar with Kielce and its environs. He, too, was among those murdered on that day.

"**Fania Sczumacher** – an intelligent young woman from the city of Rovno, who joined the Kibbutz in Kielce about two months before the pogrom, together with a group of young people who came to our city on a train of repatriated Jews returning to Poland. When they were passing through our city's train station, we were waiting for them at the station and persuaded them to stay with us in our Kibbutz, in order to emigrate with us to the Land of Israel. Fania had been a student at the Hebrew high school in her hometown. She helped us greatly with our Hebrew lessons, and always made sure to inject a unique Hebrew tone into the cultural activities we held – until the murderers took her life during the bloody pogrom.

"Naftali Teitelbaum –was a small boy when he returned from Russia with one of his relatives. He had lost his parents in Soviet Russia during the war, and was raised and educated in a Soviet orphanage. Before leaving Russia, his cousin took him from the orphanage and left him in the care of our group, while he traveled to his hometown to find out whether anyone from their family was still alive. Naftali was taken in, and integrated so well with our group that he didn't want to leave us even when his cousin came back for him. He insisted on staying, and even managed to convince his cousin to stay and join the Kibbutz. He was also murdered in that bloody Pogrom.

There were other young men and women, but there is not enough space to speak of them all and tell of their lives and their contributions to the Kibbutz. All together, we were 35 young men and women, all of whom were lonely sole survivors. Together they formed the foundation for the wonderful family that the Kibbutz assembled, united in its decision to fulfill the dream of reaching the Land of Israel and establishing new lives through building the national home." End of quote.

Already at the beginning of the pogrom, Raphael Blumenfeld was very severely wounded, in his head and all over his body, and was presumed dead for most of that day. When he regained consciousness, he found himself completely exhausted and lying in an ambulance among a pile of dead bodies, wallowing in his own blood, weak and in pain, full of overwhelming fear and anxiety.

But despite all of the horrors he experienced before and during the pogrom, Raphael Blumenfeld, of blessed memory, who instilled in thousands of youth tolerance and love for their fellow man, was the first, in the early 1990s, to begin creating new ties between former residents of Kielce who are living in Israel and the current residents of this city – by initiating joint documentation projects, through meetings and dialogues about the lost neighborliness, by searching for various ways to build new bridges and reconciliation between peoples, and by recruiting the second and third generations, people like myself, and encouraging us to continue his endeavor.

May his memory be blessed.