

Introductory Remarks by Mrs Ekaterina Trendafilova

International Holocaust Remembrance Day, 27 January 2020

Excellences, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Before turning to the substance of my remarks, I would like to share that I feel very humbled too be here today on International Holocaust Remembrance Day. I wish to express my deep gratitude to the Ambassador of Israel, Mr Naor Gilon, for having invited me to introduce today's keynote speaker, Mr Philippe Sands. I also thank the Israeli Embassy, the Municipality of The Hague and the Jewish cultural organisation, CHAJ, for having organised today's commemoration event.

Today, we gather to solemnly remember the horrific atrocities that were committed during the Holocaust, when humanity lost its way. We gather to pay tribute to the six million Jews and millions of others murdered by the Nazis. We gather to remember the generations that were lost. We gather in the hope that future generations will never forget. We will continue to pause on this day to reflect on the importance of a just and peaceful society – a society where the rule of law prevails and where those sacred words mean and continue to mean: never again.

I learned from my history, from my people, that sometimes you have to do more than just survive; you have to take a stand for what is right. I was born in Bulgaria. Make no mistake, my country joined the axis powers during the war. But my people, the citizens of Bulgaria, understood and valued the principles of humanity. They understood that sometimes, to save a neighbour – which is to save yourself – you must come together, you must put pressure on your government to protect your fellow citizens. And where you do not trust that your government will do so, you must at times lay your body over the train tracks to save your friends, your neighbours, your countrymen from death camps, because it is right.

This is what happened in Bulgaria. Our people pressured Parliament to enact a law prohibiting the deportation of more than 50 000 Jews to the concentration camps. Fearing that the government would ignore the Law, Bulgarian citizens went to the stations on the anticipated day of deportations. They were ready to lay down on the tracks, and the trains did not depart. Because the Bulgarian people knew, you must protect those at risk from harm, you must hold on to the principles of humanity.

This part of history may have been forgotten by some, but it has not been forgotten by me. It has driven me throughout my life and in my work dedicated to justice.

So too has Mr Sands been driven throughout all his life. He has worked tirelessly throughout his prolific career as a writer, a leading human rights lawyer, a professor of law, a member of various boards and commissions to ensure that those most responsible for the commission of heinous crimes are held accountable, to ensure that unknown stories are told, to ensure that we never forget.

Indeed, Mr Sands' ability, whether through his advocacy or through his writing, to illuminate aspects of history, to uncover facts, and to tell a story from a human perspective is uncanny. It is Mr Sands' insatiable curiosity and determination that led him to uncover the threads that bond two renowned legal scholars, Hersch Lauterpacht and Raphael Lemkin, in his beautifully evocative book "East West Street". It tells the story of two men who are lions of international law, it tells the story of the birth of legal concepts, the very existence of which we have never questioned. His exploration of the life of these men in the context of the search for his roots is a true recounting of history, a history that matters, in particular in our field.

We take for granted today a world order that was built from the ashes of the Holocaust – the United Nations, the European Union, our common humanity. We take for granted the very notions about which Mr Sands has so eloquently written – the

notions upon which we now rely to hold accountable those most responsible for heinous crimes: genocide and crimes against humanity.

As we stand here today, 75 years after the liberation of Auschwitz, the Holocaust is gradually passing out of living memory and into history. The increased distance from these events makes Mr Sands' work all the more important. During a time where States are turning inward, where world leaders are questioning the very need for the international institutions that were created to prevent another Holocaust, our collective voices must be heard. We must not give away the very foundations upon which our liberties were built.

As Mr Sands has demonstrated throughout his distinguished career, we cannot be complacent nor can we be pessimistic about the future of our world order. It is incumbent upon each of us to remember what happened during the Holocaust. We must continue to move the world, as imperfect as it is, to justice, to adhere to the rule of law, to care for our collective humanity and to lay down on the train tracks if needed. Indeed, if East West Street makes one thing clear, it is the influence that individuals can have on the course of history.

To quote Elie Wiesel, "*[t]here may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest*". Mr Sands has never failed to stand up, he has never failed to protest. I am honoured to introduce a man that has made the history of the luminaries of international criminal justice so lucidly present in his prose, a man who stands for what is right and stands by his words.

I now, with immense pleasure and respect, pass the floor to my distinguished colleague, Mr Philippe Sands.