



The Remembrance Day in New York. The Event Goes On, Despite the Snow

Letizia Airos (January 28, 2011)



WATCH OUR VIDEO! Despite the snowstorm the night before and several disruptions, this year's commemoration of the Remembrance Day, established in 2000 by Italian law to mark the demolition of the gates to Auschwitz, went on as scheduled. In front of the Italian Consulate the names of Italian Jews deported from Italy were read aloud as curious passers-by looked on

This is the fourth year that the names of 8,600 Italian Jews who were deported and taken to death camps echoed along Park Avenue. In front of the [Italian General Consulate](#) [2], dozens of people ranging from ordinary citizens, important community figures, students, Italians, Italian-Americans, and Americans marked the date, January 27, 1945, in which Soviet troops from the Red Army during the offensive toward Berlin, arrived in the Polish city of Oświęcim (now known by its German name as Auschwitz) to reveal its infamous concentration camp and liberate the few remaining survivors.



Holocaust Remembrance Day is a yearly event established by Italian law 211 and passed by the Italian parliament on July 20, 2000. It is worth citing the legislative code: "The Italian Republic recognizes the 27th day of January, the date of the demolition of the gates to Auschwitz, as the 'Day of Memory,' in order to remember the Shoah (the Holocaust, the extermination of the Jewish people), the racial laws, the Italian persecution of Jewish citizens, the Italians who suffered deportation, imprisonment, and death, and those who in different fields and circumstances opposed the project of extermination, and at the risk of losing their own lives saved many more lives and protected the persecuted."

The reading on Park Avenue began on time despite the snowstorm that blocked much of Manhattan. Schools, universities, and offices remained closed and on the streets there was so much snow, mud, and snarled traffic. It was a difficult day for everyone who attended but even in the cold, they were warmed by the first piercing rays of sunlight that filtered through the clouds, and once again many experienced the emotion of reciting the names of entire families and recalling an unspeakable past that should not be forgotten.

The event, the only one of its kind in the U.S., was organized by the Consulate General in collaboration with the [Centro Primo Levi](#). [3]

[NYU's Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò](#) [4], the [John D. Calandra Italian-American Institute](#) [5] at CUNY, the [Italian Academy at Columbia University](#). [6] and the [Italian Cultural Institute](#) [7] also participated with a series of events that took place this week.

The recitation of names which began at 9:00 a.m. and continued until 4:00 p.m. featured the participation of many notable figures within the Italian and Italian-American communities, including Italian Ambassador to the U.N. Cesare Ragaglini, representative of the U.N. Secretary General Ambassador Vijay Nambiar, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the U.N. Archbishop Francis Chullikatt, New York State Controller Tom DiNapoli, actor/director John Turturro (who also received his Italian citizenship that same day), Rabbi David Posner of Temple Emanu-El, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Rosemary Di Carlo, Palestinian journalist and writer Rula Jebreal, publisher Peter Kalikow, Judge Grasso, Frank Fusaro of the Columbus Citizens Foundation, and Dean of the Calandra Italian-American Institute Anthony J. Tamburri.

Consul Francesco Maria Talò stopped to talk to us and underscored the great significance of such an initiative and the importance of its recurrence each year. "The event goes on, despite the snow, despite the cold. And it must go on just as the extermination machine marched on undeterred. There were snowstorms at Auschwitz but no one cared about them nor about the humanity that was being erased there."

"The names you hear echoing on Park Avenue today are lives, they are stories of individuals and entire families. We believe it is our duty to continue to do this; we are very proud to be the only ones in New York to organize an event like this. The United Nations cancelled events today and schools and offices are closed, but we are here to recall and bear in mind the persecutions of our time."

The event takes on even more meaning in New York where the Jewish presence is so vital. In a recent interview with i-Italy, Senior Rabbi Arthur Schneier of [Park East Synagogue](#) [8] demonstrated the impact of this event by recalling the strong commitment of the Italian community during the Holocaust.

In addition to the reading of names on January 27, the "Week of Memory" is a series of events, which convey the successful teamwork behind it. The system of Italian and Italian-American institutions worked in unison on this initiative, and in so doing the Italian Consulate became a meeting place that served an important educational function. As every year, school children participated in reading the names. In particular, Scuola d'Italia and Park East Synagogue were both present this year despite the school closings.

We recall, in conclusion, a few important words in memory of [Tullia Zevi](#) [9], the only woman to have led the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, who passed away a few days ago. She decided to



devote her life to bearing witness.

"I could live in America; I studied there, it's where I arrived when I was very young. I went through the tragedy of the camps. I survived. I found myself as a Jew living in Europe after the war. The Jews lived in Italy for two thousand years. Overnight, we were told: 'You're nobody; you're no longer a person; you have no rights.' I felt it was right to return not only to try and help this community, which has a two thousand year history, to live again, but also to testify as a journalist and as a person."

"To live again ... " even in New York, probably the most Italian city outside of Italy and the most Jewish city, outside of Israel.

EVENTS OF THE WEEK OF REMEMBRANCE

Friday, January 21 | 9.30 am – Scuola d'Italia "G. Marconi", 406 East 67th Street : New York and Naples: Harbors of Dialogue", a dialogue on tolerance between Naples Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe e Rabbi Arthur Schneier

Thursday, January 27 | 9 am to 4 pm –Italian Consulate (690 Park Avenue) - Outdoor reading of the names of the Italian victims of the Shoah

Thursday, January 27 | pm – Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò at New York University, 24 West 12 St: presentation of a special issue of the magazine Zaprunder on memory and colonialism.

Friday, January 28 | 12 pm - The John Calandra Institute for Italian American Studies at CUNY, 25 West 43rd Street: A Difficult Identity? Literary Representations of the Shoah from Liana Millu to Helena Janeczek

Sunday, January 30 | pm - Primo Levi Center, 15 West 16th Street: "The Jews of Italy between Antifascism and Resistance", a conference on the contribution of the Italian Jewish to the Liberation of Italy

Tuesday, February 1 | pm - The Italian Academy at Columbia University, 1161 Amsterdam Avenue Symposium: "Racially Inferior: Roma, Sinti and other Holocaust victims".

For further information, see <http://www.primolevicenter.org/Home.html> [3]

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Links

[1] <http://108.61.128.93/files/nyc-taking-remembrance-day-street>

[2] http://www.consnewyork.esteri.it/Consolato_NewYork

[3] <http://www.primolevicenter.org/Home.html>

[4] <http://www.casaitaliananyu.org/>

[5] <http://qcpages.qc.cuny.edu/calandra/index.html>

[6] <http://www.italianacademy.columbia.edu/>

[7] http://www.iicnewyork.esteri.it/IIC_NewYork

[8] <http://www.parkeastsynagogue.org/>

[9] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tullia_Zevi