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REMEMBER SO IT WON'T HAPPEN AGAIN

27 January 2008 - International Holocaust Remembrance Day

*"I don't know what a Jew is;
we only know what human beings are".
Pastor Andre Trocme*

This year, for a second time in a row, Protestant churches in Bulgaria commemorated the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, January 27. This coordinated effort came as a result of an all-European campaign initiated by European Coalition for Israel (ECI) - an organization that unites different Protestant and Catholic Christian ministries in Europe working together against the rising new anti-Semitism in Europe as well as promoting cooperation and strengthening of the relations between the European Union and the State of Israel.

In 2007, the official representative of Christian Friends of Israel (CFI) for Bulgaria, Mitka Atanasova, disseminated information about the planned commemoration of this day by many churches in Europe and appealed to the churches in Bulgaria to participate in this all-European campaign initiated by ECI. As a result, a group of Protestant churches in Bulgaria commemorated this important date for the first time.

In the end of 2007, two Christian organizations in Bulgaria - Christian Friends of Israel and Victory Christian Center, in coordination with European Coalition for Israel, united their efforts and launched a campaign among the Protestant churches and Jewish communities in Bulgaria for commemorating the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, which takes place on January 27, the day when Auschwitz was liberated.

In Bulgaria the campaign has been conducted under the motto "Remember so it won't happen again". The campaign is aimed against the unprecedented level of anti-Semitism in Bulgaria and works to involve the Protestant churches in active education of the present generations about the monstrous annihilation of six millions men, women and children during World War II in the Nazi death camps.

The objective of the campaign is to inform Bulgarian Protestant churches and ministries about the commemoration of this important date as well as to equip Christian leaders at the national and local level with the necessary resources for conducting a special service dedicated to the tragic events of the Holocaust.

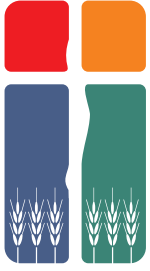
For this purpose, CFI-Bulgaria and Victory Christian Center-Sofia created an internet site, containing extensive information in the form of sermons, teachings, brochures, pictures, posters and video films that can be used for the special commemoration service in honor of the Holocaust Remembrance Day. You can still visit the site at the following addresses:

<http://www.remember-holocaust.info/>
<http://holocaust.coolinc.info/>

Realizing that not all Christian leaders in Bulgaria have free access to internet, Victory Christian Center put together a brochure that could be mailed to church leaders and ministries throughout the country.

Within the networks of CFI-Bulgaria and Victory Christian Center in Sofia, about 500 color brochures, together with Pr. Avramov's article, "The Painful Relationship of Israel and the Church" were mailed to pastors and church leaders, Christian ministries and the local Jewish communities; over 300 black-and-white copies of the brochure have been additionally circulated throughout the country; we also have information that many churches have





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printed out the brochure from our internet site and have distributed it at a local level. These materials have also been made available to Bulgarian government institutions as part of their regular receiving of CFI materials.

Reaching out to yet other pastors and church leaders throughout the country Pr. Avramov has sent the same materials to 700 more e-mail addresses. In this he had the support of leaders of several different church networks and denominations who made their contact database available for the mailing. The leaders of the Bulgarian Evangelical Alliance, a partnership encompassing most of the Evangelical denominations in Bulgaria, have endorsed the campaign, forwarding the materials to all the members within their organization.

We have information that over 4000 Christians have received the same materials via the largest Christian Bulgarian portal, Bibliata.com, where we had submitted the materials.

The internet site dedicated to the campaign that we have put together has been visited by over 2000 people within a four week period. However, there are some troubling facts in that regard. When the site was posted in several youth chat forums, within a few minutes it received several hundred responses, about 80 % of which were negative. This shows that anti-Semitism, which is not typical of the older generations in Bulgaria, has spread its poison among the younger generations of Bulgarians and that large-scale coordinated efforts at all levels of society are needed, in order to oppose this phenomenon.

On the other hand, the positive reactions to the site's contents, even though significantly smaller in number, were extremely encouraging and testify to the powerful influence that the site can have on young people who didn't know anything about the Holocaust. Here are some of those reactions:

A 15-year-old girl from Varna: "This is not human! What is said here is very true: that those horrifying years of human history "till today make us feel ashamed that we are human beings"! Every time I look at pictures from the Holocaust, I am horrified. I know that it has happened, I see the pictures, but I cannot possibly imagine such a thing. The more I try to imagine what the Holocaust victims could have felt, the more my mind refuses to think and to accept that this could have ever been a reality. When I saw the picture of one of those children of whom almost nothing was left, I started crying. How is it possible for a human being to do this to another human being? They didn't like the Jews - ok, they decided to kill them - this is cruel iniquity, but to torture a child in this way... What is a child's fault for his name being Albert or Nissim? What was his fault for being born a Jew? Isn't he the same as all other children, called Stefan, John or Pier ... I tried to go through all the materials on the site, but I just wasn't capable of doing that. I came to the pictures and couldn't take it anymore. I had to turn off the screen. I know that many people have died. This cannot be corrected. We can only live as we remember and respect their memory. I know that the best way to do that is to know the whole truth and to remember the horror of those pictures. I know it but I can't stop crying when looking at those pictures..."

Here is another telling reaction of a young man: After viewing the site, he wrote that just a few days ago, in a chat forum, he had posted an anecdote about the gas chambers and now he just can't stand himself for doing this. He was absolutely shocked by what he had seen and realized.



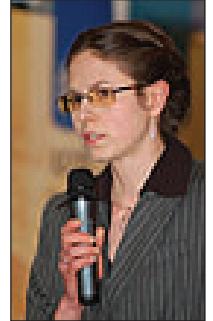
As a result of the campaign, 216 Protestant churches in Bulgaria have registered their participation, commemorating the Holocaust Remembrance Day with a special event. Certainly not all churches have registered their participation as many do not have free internet access. This would mean that at least 250 churches have participated, making about 25 % of all Protestant churches in the country. We are still receiving feedback from churches that have participated.

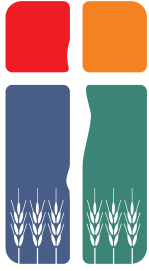
The campaign has been given publicity in some of the most popular Christian national media, as well as by some of the local media in northeastern Bulgaria. Also, "Jewish News", the official national publication of the Shalom Jewish Organization in Bulgaria, has published materials about the campaign. At different places, either by the initiative of individual Christians who work in



public schools, or as collective initiatives of local churches, special educational events about the Holocaust directed towards students and teachers have been organized.

Representatives of the Jewish communities throughout the country have been present at the commemorating events, organized by the local churches and many of them have officially participated in those events. Everywhere the Jewish people have responded in an overwhelming way,





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describing their experience at the events as something they will never forget.

Such was also the response of the Jewish guests present at the event organized by Victory Christian Center in Sofia. The official guests who spoke at the commemorating service there were Mr. Uri Reznik, Deputy to the Israeli Ambassador in Bulgaria and Mr. Alek Oskar, Chairman of the Jewish Regional Organization in Sofia. There were also some young people from the Jewish community who shared about their life-changing experience during their visit to the places of the death camps in Auschwitz and Birkenau in Poland as part of the March of the Living. A young lady from Victory Christian Center shared about the presentation on the Holocaust that she did before the teachers and students at the school where she works.

The service concluded with Pr. Avramov's sermon about the history and nature of anti-Semitism. In different periods of human history, anti-Semitism has been capable of penetrating various religious, philosophical and ethical systems, including many that are very strong in their moral aspects, such as Christianity. The sermon focused on the shameful and tragic role of the Church in the spreading of anti-Semitism in Europe throughout its history and our responsibility as present day Christians to do all we can so that there may never be another Holocaust.



The texts from the speeches of all participants (in Bulgarian) as well as a video from Mr. Uri Reznik's speech (a video with part of Pr. Avramov's sermon will be uploaded soon) can be found on the church's site:

<http://www.victory.bg/holocaust.php>



A special privilege has been Mr. Uri Reznik's invitation to Pr. Avramov for participation in the Global Forum Against Anti-Semitism, sponsored by Israel's Foreign Ministry, which took place Jerusalem on Feb 24-25, 2008. At the Forum, Bulgaria was represented by Mr. Dobrin Kanev, Secretary to the President of Bulgaria, Mr. Dimitar Abadjiev, a member of the Bulgarian Parliament, and Pastor Andrey Avramov. In his capacity of a representative of the European Parliament, Mr. Kristiyan Vigenin, a Bulgarian MEP, was also present.

The Forum featured leading world experts on the issues of anti-Semitism - people who are spearheading the battle against Holocaust denial and the spreading of anti-Semitism throughout Europe and the world today. Anti-semitism is not an isolated event - it's a global process that needs to be resisted by all possible means until it is stopped! We trust that the experience gained from participation in this conference can be very valuable for our future work in Bulgaria and in Europe.

We are in the process of consolidating information and resources, believing that next year, the campaign in Bulgaria will be even larger in scale.

We extend our deepest thanks to all who supported us in prayer and helped make this campaign a success. We are truly grateful to all Protestant churches and their pastors who responded to the call not to be silent, but to speak out and to do all they can to educate today's generations with the truth about the Holocaust - to remember so it won't happen again.



*On behalf of the campaign
coordination team for Bulgaria,*

Pastor Andrey Avramov



remember so it won't happen again