



Simon Wiesenthal Prize 2022: Award for projects to combat antisemitism and educate the public about the Holocaust presented in Parliament

13 Mar 2023

Main prize for "Remembrance in the Living Room", contemporary witnesses honoured

Vienna (PK) - For the second time, civic engagement to combat antisemitism and to educate the public about the Holocaust was honoured with the Simon Wiesenthal Prize in Parliament on Monday. This year, the prize once again attracted great international interest, with over 260 applications from more than 30 countries. Projects were submitted from Israel, the USA, Argentina, Peru and South Africa, among others. National Council President Wolfgang Sobotka thanked the participants and the contemporary eyewitnesses for their "invaluable service" in the fight against antisemitism.

The main prize was awarded to the Israeli initiative Zikaron BaSalon ("Remembrance in the Living Room"), in which private individuals invite Holocaust survivors into their living rooms and offer them the opportunity to share their memories. In the category of "Education about the Holocaust", Waltraud Barton and her association IM-MER, which preserves the memory of more than 10,000 murdered Austrians who were deported to Minsk and Maly Trostenets, received an award. For his fight against antisemitism, Mohammed S. Dajani Daoudi was honoured by the jury and commission. Having educated Jewish-Israeli university students about the Nakba (expulsion and flight of Palestinians in 1948) and Palestinian students about the Holocaust, lost his academic position and experienced threats to his personal safety. The Simon Wiesenthal Prize is endowed with a total of €30,000, with €15,000 going to the main prize and €7,500 to each of the two other categories.

Also honoured were contemporary witnesses Wanda Albińska (Poland), Lucia Heilmann (Austria), Tsvi Herschel (Israel) and Jackie Young (Great Britain). Heilmann also spoke with the jury chair and Antisemitism Officer of the EU Commission, Katharina von Schnurbein, as well as Wiesenthal's granddaughter, Racheli Kreisberg, about the nature and future of contemporary witnessing. In honour of the late journalist and Simon Wiesenthal Award winner Karl Pfeifer, actress Martina Ebm read from his notes, which he had wanted to present himself in Parliament in book form. Jasmin Meiri-Brauer and Jannis Raptis provided the musical accompaniment to the award ceremony. The evening was hosted by Lisa Gadenstätter from the ORF.

National Council President Sobotka on the fight against the "primordial evil" of antisemitism

In his opening remarks, National Council President Wolfgang Sobotka recalled the architect, publicist and writer Simon Wiesenthal (1908-2005), who, after his liberation from the Mauthausen concentration camp, made it his life's work to bring about justice for the victims of the Nazi regime and to hold the perpetrators accountable. It is an honour for the Parliament that the prize may bear his name. Wiesenthal had not always been treated in Austria as he should have been, but today, Austria knows it owes him a debt of gratitude, Sobotka said. As a "shining light of the Second Republic", Wiesenthal had done an enormous amount to come to terms with the crimes of National Socialism and had brought many perpetrators to justice - not out of revenge, but as a clear commitment to the rule of law.

It took a long time for Austria to acknowledge its history, Sobotka explained. Now, in the spirit of Wiesenthal, everything must be done to ensure that this never happens again. "Never again" must not be allowed to degenerate into an empty phrase but must instead be filled with life. He described antisemitism as a "primordial evil" that has characterised Europe for centuries. He said that it was not a phenomenon restricted to the right-wing or left-wing fringe but rather came from the centre of society and had to be fought resolutely, especially in times of its growth. Noting that Wiesenthal and other contemporary witnesses provide a guideline for this, Sobotka thanked them for their "invaluable service" and expressed his pleasure that the Parliament offered a corresponding platform.

"Remembrance in the Living Room" receives top prize

1.5 million hosts and participants from over 65 countries have already taken part in the Israeli initiative Zikaron BaSalon since it was launched in 2011. In "Remembrance in the Living Room" - as it is called in English - private individuals invite people into their living rooms to give Shoah survivors the opportunity to share their experiences. It is often only in this environment that they are able to talk about their experiences. Their testimonies are one of the "most effective vaccines against antisemitism", explained Katharina von Schnurbein, jury chair and Antisemitism Officer of the EU Commission, in her laudatory speech. This impact must be used while it is still possible, she said.

Sharon Buenos from Zikaron BaSalon also spoke about the obligation to give the surviving contemporary witnesses a chance to bear their testimony of what happened during the Nazi era. Their project is about building bridges both between countries and between generations.

Also nominated were the LIKRAT dialogue project, which brings together Jewish and non-Jewish youth, the Swedish Committee Against Antisemitism, and the Mota de Judíos Cultural Association - the latter for its efforts to revive the historical Jewish heritage of a Spanish village and to change the village's name, which was offensive to Jews.

Prize for education about the Holocaust goes to Waltraud Barton

The prize in the category of "Education about the Holocaust" was awarded to Waltraud Barton, founder of the association IM-MER, which has taken on the task of preserving the memory of more than 10,000 Austrians deported to Minsk and Maly Trostenets during the Second World War

and murdered in the greater Minsk area. It is thanks to Barton's "untiring commitment" to the memory of the deportees that there is now also a memorial to this effect, said historian and jury member Brigitte Bailer at the award ceremony. Many Austrians had not heard of Maly Trostenets, although nowhere else had so many Viennese been deported and murdered, Barton reported. This "unimaginable monstrosity" is now commemorated by a memorial that makes it impossible to overlook and anchors the location in the collective memory.

The nominees also included the Association for Active Commemoration and Remembrance Culture, which commemorates the long-forgotten flight of Jews across the Austrian Alps in 1947 by means of an annual dialogue forum and a memorial hike, and the Zweitzeugen association, which encourages young people in particular to pass on the life stories of contemporary witnesses as "secondary witnesses".

Mohammed S. Dajani Daoudi honoured for his commitment against antisemitism

In the spring of 2014, Mohammed S. Dajani Daoudi became known beyond Israel's borders when he organised a trip to Auschwitz for a group of 27 Palestinian students. His goal was to educate them about the Holocaust and Jewish-Israeli students about the Nakba - the flight and expulsion of Palestinians in 1948. This led to the loss of Dajani's academic position at Al-Quds University and threats to his personal safety. Laudator Oskar Deutsch, President of the Jewish Religious Society of Austria, spoke of the relevance of historical awareness for successful coexistence. The award honoured not only the courage of the laureate but, above all, his "very personal contribution" in the fight against antisemitism. In his acceptance speech, Mohammed S. Dajani Daoudi expressed his hope that, one day, knowledge will triumph over ignorance.

The jury also advocated the Europäische Janusz-Korczak-Akademie, which works to strengthen the Jewish community and identity as well as interreligious dialogue, and the DEIN e.V. association for democracy and information, which works to combat antisemitism, distortion of history, and hate propaganda.

Conversation about the nature and future of contemporary witnessing

In the conversation that followed, contemporary witness Lucia Heilman told of the fear she had experienced under the Nazi regime, which also shaped her life after the Second World War. For a long time, she was unable to talk about it. For her, however, it makes a big difference whether people learn about the events of that time from books or from survivors. Heilman discussed the reactions of students to whom she had told her story and been impressed by the questions they had asked.

Wiesenthal's granddaughter, Racheli Kreisberg, told of experiences with her grandfather and how his relationship with his native Austria had changed over the years. While the relationship used to be characterised by fear, it has increasingly improved - up to the present day, when a prize is awarded in his name in Parliament.

Katharina von Schnurbein, Antisemitism Officer of the EU Commission, spoke about the importance of being a contemporary witness. For the survivors, this is often connected with pain, as they have to recall their experiences again and again. As long as this possibility exists, it must be used. In the future, it will be necessary to empower young people to continue telling these stories. (Conclusion)

Source: Parliamentary correspondence No. 273/2023 as of 13 March 2023

Links

- Pictures of the award ceremony in the media library
- Press release on the nominations for the Simon Wiesenthal Prize 2022