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Report on the Presentation of the Book “Exile in Australia”

05 Nov 2018

On Tuesday 2 October 2018 the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism presented volume 5 of its series *“Erinnerungen. Lebensgeschichten von Opfern des Nationalsozialismus/Lives Remembered. Life Stories of Victims of National Socialism”* dealing with “Exile in Australia” at the Australian Embassy in Vienna.



The event proved very popular and the room on the third floor of the Winterthur Building with its stunning view over the *Karlsplatz* square was well filled. Around 140 guests came to hear about the escape stories of Austrians who had fled the Nazi regime to Australia. The journalist and historian Dr. Barbara Tóth guided the audience through the evening.

The event's host, Ambassador Dr. Brendon Hammer, opened the proceedings. In his words of welcome he emphasised the important role of the Austrian emigrants in Australian society. Between 1938 and the outbreak of World War II alone, around 2,000 Austrian refugees arrived in Australia, where they had huge positive influence on Australian society in the fields of science, culture and medicine.

"I consider the publication of Exile in Australia, and today's event, not only as a commemoration to those who have suffered enormous pain, death and injustice during one of the darkest periods of Western civilisation, but as an opportunity to promote and advance healing; to build bridges and promote tolerance; to recognize the importance of exchange and fostering understanding; to show respect and to cherish diversity; to value the peace and freedom that we all now have within the world's liberal democracies; and to think carefully about the political choices we will all be asked to make as we take our democratic project forward."

The President of the Austrian-Australian Society, MP Dr. Reinhold Lopatka appeared on behalf of Mag. Wolfgang Sobotka, the Chairman of the National Fund's Board of Trustees, and thanked the National Fund for its tireless and vital efforts to pass on knowledge about the Nazi period. He also emphasised that is was the responsibility and duty of the members of all political factions in Parliament to carry out this task. For as long as there are still surviving eyewitnesses around an authentic record must be made of their experiences.

The Secretary General of the National Fund, Mag. Hannah Lessing extended an especially warm welcome to the descendants of the eyewitnesses whose recollections are published in volume 5 of the series. "*The experience of persecution and expulsion echoes on down through the generations. Today, we can only try to repair those ties that were so brutally broken by the persecution of parents and grandparents by forging a new connection with their children and grandchildren. I hope that this book can contribute to that."*

The series' Editor, and Scientific Director of the National Fund, Dr. Renate S. Meissner then went on to introduce volume 5. In her presentation she discussed the features that made this volume special, such as the differing natures of the texts, the use of photo albums, stories told from a number of perspectives and the escape routes, timeline and comprehensive glossary. She also introduced a number of family histories that provided an insight into the varied paths of escape and deportation taken by so many people.

In the subsequent discussion between Dr Tóth and the descendants of eyewitnesses, Amber Kehm, Mag. Susanne Altschul, Tania de Jong AM und Dr Yves Laisné, the different coping strategies of each family became apparent. While Ms Altschul's father returned to Austria with his Australian wife soon after the war to help rebuild the country, Ms Kehm's grandmother never wished to set foot in Austria again. Tania de Jong's mother, who arrived in Australia as a young child, had a different approach, establishing a museum with the furniture and artworks of her family and by doing so, bringing a little piece of Vienna to Australia. Tania de Jong travels a lot herself with her work and was keen to stress that, "*Home is where the heart is*". Her mother's cousin, Dr Yves Laisné, grew up in France – his mother and his aunt saw each other just one last time after the war but remained close throughout their lives.

The charismatic singer Tania de Jong, who inspires people with her music and her keynotes at concerts and congresses around the world, provided musical accompaniment to the evening. She visibly moved the audience with her choice of song and emotional speech and encouraged them to sing along.

Afterwards at the Ambassador's reception, there was the opportunity for animated conversation.

The National Fund would like to thank the Australian Embassy for the fruitful partnership and the Jewish Welcome Service Vienna, which made it possible for us to invite the descendants of the survivors.

Further information on the book series *"Erinnerungen. Lebensgeschichten von Opfern des Nationalsozialismus/Lives Remembered. Life Stories of Victims of National Socialism"* and particularly on volume 5 "Exile in Australia" and information on how to order a copy can be found here:

- **Book series *"Erinnerungen. Lebensgeschichten von Opfern des Nationalsozialismus/Lives Remembered. Life Stories of Victims of National Socialism"***
- **Volume 5** ***"Exile in Australia"***