



Latvijas Republikas Valsts prezidenta kanceleja Prezidenta preses dienests

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Address by H. E. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of Latvia, at the presentation of Stephen Spielberg's film The Last Days, Riga movie theatre, Riga, 5 January 2000

Good evening Excellencies,
ladies and gentlemen,

The film which we will be viewing this evening reflects the eyewitness experiences of the previous century about events so horrifying that it is difficult to talk about them. That is why one must view as extremely courageous the wish and the readiness of these eyewitnesses to share with others in their experiences.

Of all tragedies, one of the greatest lies in the killing of innocent people. And one of the greatest sorrows lies in the fact that such criminals have come also from amongst our midst. Criminals, of course will always exist. But the crimes which took place during the Holocaust stand out with something particularly horrifying, for they took place in the name of an ideology which saw as its main goal the expulsion of representatives of a particular religion or race from the midst of others. The difference between barbarism and civilization is shown in our readiness to see our fellow human beings as brothers.

The words at the memorial in Salaspils read: "Beyond these gates the earth moans." Such earth, which has been soaked with innocent blood, will continue to moan for an eternity. But those who live on bear the responsibility of understanding the past, of overcoming it, and of ensuring that it does not repeat itself. We in Latvia manifestly disassociate ourselves from the differentiation of our fellow beings and condemn discrimination in all its forms. Our responsibility, from the President of the country to the elementary school pupil, is to be aware of our history and to ensure that the next century is different from the last. We are at the beginning of a new century. Let us hope that it will be an age of civilization and humanity.