



Message from the President of the Swiss Confederation Ueli Maurer on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, 27 January 2019

Respect and dignity

Today, International Holocaust Remembrance Day, we commemorate the victims of a criminal regime and its collaborators who brought death and destruction to Europe and violently inflicted death on millions of people. It was a dark time of humiliation, of fear, of killing; without humanity, without respect, without dignity.

The victims of targeted hatred which exposed them to extermination by other people were six million Jewish women, men and children who bore no guilt whatsoever. They just wanted to live. They went about their daily lives, worked, their children went to school and played with their friends; they hoped, dreamt, read and learnt. Just like all of us and our children, and the children of our children.

Our thoughts today are with the Jews, with the Sinti, the Roma and the Yenish, as well as with other victims of National Socialism who suffered, were persecuted, and died inhumanly and cruelly during this time. We also think of the survivors, for whom even after the war the memory of persecution was and is a constant companion. One of them was the Italian writer Primo Levi, who would have turned 100 this year. In his books, he described how the prisoners were denied human dignity even before they were killed. The agonising memory of his experiences in the Auschwitz-Monowitz concentration camp never left him. He committed suicide in 1987.

No commemoration ceremony will ever undo the crimes of the Second World War; the life which has been annihilated cannot be brought back. But those who can no longer speak hold up a mirror to every country, including Switzerland. Like other countries, we also face up to the mistakes of the past. Humanity is a good of which there can never be enough.

We remember out of conviction, without any ritualisation. We remember above all the generations of our children and grandchildren because the horrors of recent history may already be far away for them. But we also think of the present because a glance at the headlines in the press and on the internet shows how often human dignity is disregarded everywhere in today's world. This is not the world that we want to unquestioningly leave to our children; the young people and young adults entrusted to us depend on us to provide them with ethical guidelines for a dignified and respectful coexistence of all people.

Our remembrance today is an elementary imperative of respect and human dignity.

The first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights".

Respect and dignity are so easy to say. But there can be a huge gulf between the word and the deed. Our personal background, our religion, our view of the world, our present life situation, our appearance and our origin, all this may separate us from each other. But one day any of us may suddenly belong to a minority whose right to protection, respect and dignity is questioned or even threatened. Each of us has his or her dignity which must be protected and respected under all circumstances. Always.

For as Primo Levi noted after his bitter experience: *"It happened, and consequently it can happen again."*