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HOLOCAUST MUSEUM COMMEMORATES KRISTALLNACHT; UNVEILS NAMES OF RESCUERS NEWLY ADDED TO FOUNTAIN OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center remembers the 72nd Anniversary of Kristallnacht with commemoration event and special ceremony to honor Holocaust rescuers

SKOKIE – Nearly 150 people gathered at the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center Tuesday evening, including Holocaust survivors and their families, to commemorate the 72nd anniversary of Kristallnacht and pay special tribute to the courageous acts of Holocaust rescuers in an “Appreciation of the Righteous” ceremony, during which the Museum unveiled five new additions to those honored on its Fountain of the Righteous.

Holocaust survivors, some of whom were eyewitnesses to Kristallnacht, looked on during the Museum’s “Appreciation of the Righteous” ceremony as the names of rescuers Liesel and Luise Gansz (Germany), Gerhardus and Elizabeth Heuker (Netherlands), Derk and Johanna Schukkink (Netherlands), Hendrickus and Dina Lievestro (Netherlands) and Konstancija Brazeniene (Lithuania) were unveiled. The names join those of 58 rescuers already commemorated on the fountain so that their courageous actions may forever be remembered. Other rescuers inscribed on the Museum’s Fountain of the Righteous include, Oskar Schindler (Germany), Irena Sendler (Poland), Raoul Wallenberg (Sweden), and Chiune-Sempo Sugihara (Japan).

“I am here and my family is here because the Gorskis took a chance and agreed to hide me in their attic,” said Aaron Elster, Museum board vice-president and Holocaust survivor. Elster refers to Hipolit and Franciszka Gorski of Poland who were honored at the Museum’s 2009 Kristallnacht commemoration. “So many of us survived because someone made a difficult choice, stood up, risked their life, and did the right thing. It is important that we remember their actions, not just as a way to pay tribute and say thank you, but also as a reminder to us all that everyone has a part to play in combating hate and intolerance. Just one person can make a difference.”

After the recognition ceremony, guests gathered in the Museum’s Goodman Auditorium for a special Kristallnacht commemoration that included a presentation by Frank Stern, Holocaust survivor and direct witness to Kristallnacht, during which he shared his unique perspective on these historic events and how they are perceived today. Additionally, the program included remarks from the Museum’s interns from Germany and Austria, Marie Maternus and Florian Mullegger, as well as a special welcome from Richard S. Hirschhaut, executive director, Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center.

On the evening of November 9, 1938, which has come to be known as Kristallnacht – the Night of Broken Glass – the Nazis’ staged vicious state-sanctioned, anti-Semitic riots against the Jewish community in Germany. Jewish cemeteries, hospitals, schools and homes were ransacked and

destroyed. Some 1,400 synagogues were attacked and burned, 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to concentration camps and more than 100 Jews were killed.

“Kristallnacht was a critical moment in the history of the Holocaust, where violence was met with indifference by countless bystanders and, as a result, the situation for Jews and others in Europe rapidly deteriorated,” said Hirschhaut. “It is therefore fitting that on this day we also honor the “righteous”—those who had the courage to care and take action when so many others did not. They provide a constant reminder that it is our responsibility to stand up for others in the face of tyranny.”

Likely the last international institution of its kind built with the active participation of Holocaust survivors, the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center is the largest facility in the Midwest dedicated to preserving the memories of those lost in the Holocaust and to teaching current generations to fight hatred, indifference and genocide in today’s world. To learn more, visit www.ilholocaustmuseum.org.

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