



**BUILDING A STRONG BRIDGE  
BETWEEN  
THE JEWISH AND ALBANIAN PEOPLES**

*THE ALBANIAN AMERICAN CIVIC LEAGUE DISCOVERS AND  
THE ALBANIAN AMERICAN FOUNDATION PUBLICIZES THE UNIQUE STORY OF JEWISH SURVIVAL  
IN ALBANIAN LANDS DURING THE HOLOCAUST*

**CONGRESSIONAL CELEBRATORY LUNCHEON**

*THE 100<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY of the  
INDEPENDENCE OF ALBANIA  
and  
THE SAVING ROLE OF ALBANIANS  
DURING THE HOLOCAUST*

**Kennedy Caucus Room, Russell Senate Building  
US Capitol — Washington, DC  
November 28, 2012**

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# Working for the Albanian National Cause in Washington since 1989

“Mbahu nëno mos ki frikë  
se ke djemtë në Amerikë”

“My mother, do not be afraid.  
You have sons in America!”

*Fan S. Noli*

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Gëzuar 100 vjetorin e Pavarësisë së Shqipërisë  
Rejoice and Be Glad on the 100th Anniversary of the Independence of Albania

## Albanian American Civic League

*Liga Qytetare Shqiptaro Amerikane*

P.O. Box 70, Ossining, NY 10562 . Tel: (914) 762-5530 . [www.aacl.com](http://www.aacl.com)



November 28, 2012

Dear Friends,

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the independence of Albania, it is fitting that we recognize the unique role that Albanians played in rescuing Jews from the Nazi Holocaust. Every Jew who made it to Albanian lands during World War II was saved, and Albania was the only country in Europe that had more Jews after the war than before it. It is also fitting to recognize that the rescue in Albania could not have happened without the help of Albanians living in Nazi-occupied Kosova.

As Jewish American philanthropist Harvey Sarnet, author of *Rescue in Albania*, learned when he became deeply involved with documenting the story of Albanian rescuers and Jewish survivors, the ancient Illyrian tradition of *besa* was the source of Albanian tolerance and compassion. While six million Jews were exterminated, thousands of Jews were saved because of *besa*—the code of honor that requires an Albanian to save the life of anyone seeking refuge,—regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender, and even if it means sacrificing one's own life.

On this anniversary we have an obligation to tell the truth: that the Albanians of Albania, Kosova, Macedonia, Montenegro, the Presheva Valley in southern Serbia, and Chameria in northern Greece are Muslims, Catholics, Eastern Orthodox Christians, and Jews who have lived side by side in harmony for hundreds of years. Albanians represent the solution, not the problem, in the Balkans.

It is also important on November 28 that all of us—Albanians and non-Albanians—recognize the role that Jewish communities played in helping Albanians break the silence about Slobodan Milosevic's genocidal wars against Bosnian Muslims and Kosovar Albanians in the 1990s. When the West failed to act to stop a decade of carnage, Jews throughout the world invoked the message of the Holocaust, *Never Again!*

Finally, we recognize the twenty-second anniversary of Congressman Tom Lantos' 1990 visit (with former Congressman Joe DioGuardi) to Kosova and Albania. During the trip to Albania then Communist dictator Ramiz Alia gave Congressman Lantos, the first U.S. official to visit the country in fifty years, a thick file from the Communist archives. The file, later authenticated by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority in Israel, revealed the historic role of Albanians in saving Jews from the Nazi genocide—a legacy that the Communist regime had concealed since the end of World War II.

On November 28, 2012, the Board of Directors and members of the Albanian American Civic League and Foundation bear witness to all those who died in the Holocaust and to all those Albanians who took extraordinary steps so that others might live.

**Shirley Cloyes DioGuardi**  
**Balkan Affairs Adviser**  
**Albanian American Civic League**

**Hon. Joseph J. DioGuardi**  
**President**  
**Albanian American Civic League**

Jerusalem, November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012

**Greetings from Avner Shalev, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate,  
To Events in US Congress Marking 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Albanian Independence**

Dear distinguished participants in the Albanian Centenary events sponsored by the Albanian American Civic League,

In 1934, Herman Bernstein, an American Jew who had served until the previous year as the United States Ambassador to Albania, wrote:

*"There is no trace of any discrimination against Jews in Albania, because Albania happens to be one of the rare lands in Europe today where religious prejudice and hate do not exist, even though Albanians themselves are divided into three faiths."*

Bernstein could not have known at the time that his positive and accurate appraisal of Albania's characteristic tolerance and pluralism was actually a prophetic forecast of events to transpire nearly a decade later, during World War II.

The inspiring story of the rescue of the Jews of and in Albania, including many hundreds from other European nations, has gained justified fame as a rare ray of light in the darkness of the Holocaust of Europe's Jews.

Albanians succeeded where many other European nations failed.

As phrased succinctly by Gavra Mandil, a Yugoslavian Jew saved with his family by the Veseli's of the mountain town Kruja, the Albanian people are *"very kindhearted, warm and humane. They may not have been educated on the heritage of Goethe and Schiller, but they attached the greatest importance to human life, in a most natural and unquestioning way. In those dark days, when Jewish life in Europe didn't count much, the Albanians protected the Jews with love, dedication and sacrifice...."*

This testimony has been borne out in case after case – 69 to date – of Holocaust-era rescue in Albania, that have earned the world-famous recognition of Yad Vashem's Commission for the Designation of the Righteous Among the Nations. The names of each of these Albanian Righteous are etched in the stone plaques which line our Garden of the Righteous on the slopes of Yad Vashem's Mount of Remembrance campus in Jerusalem. They compose a small but outstanding portion of the over 24,000 Righteous so honored by Yad Vashem, on behalf of the State of Israel and the entire Jewish people.



Many of the Albanian rescuers were Moslem, yet felt no qualms about risking their own lives, nor those of their families, to save Jews. On the contrary: their courage, remarkable to us, seemed perfectly normal to them, a natural enactment of their vow – their "*Besa*" – to their Jewish neighbors and guests. Indeed, this core moral concept of "*Besa*" serves as the name and theme of Yad Vashem's acclaimed photo exhibition devoted to the rescue of Jews by Albanian Muslims. Opened at Yad Vashem in 2007, the exhibition has since travelled to seven nations, including displays at United Nations headquarters and the British Parliament, and serves as graphic illustration both of Albanian bravery and of Jewish remembrance and appreciation.

A hallowed vow of loyalty to truth and freedom bound our two peoples in a time of unprecedented horror, and continues to tie us together in better times, as each nation progresses in its growth and development.

As Albania celebrates its centennial of independence, Yad Vashem salutes you, proud of our role in recording, making known and honoring this superb facet of Albania's heritage. We are confident that your nation, as well as your friends in the United States and elsewhere around the world, will continue to remember and represent the values that so many of your citizens steadfastly upheld during the *Shoah*.

With warm regards from Jerusalem,

Avner Shalev  
Chairman  
Yad Vashem Directorate



הרבנות הראשית לישראל

Office Of The Chief Rabbi Of Israel  
Rabbi Yona Metzger

לשכת הרב הראשי לישראל  
הרב יונה מצגר

November 28, 2012

**To: Hon. Joseph J. DioGuardi, Shirley Cloyes DioGuardi, and the Board of the  
Albanian American Civic League and Foundation**

It is an honor to greet you as you gather in the US Capitol on November 28 to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Albania's independence from the Ottoman Empire and to recognize Albanians who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.

Albania is the only nation that can claim that every Jew who either lived in Albania or sought refuge there was saved during World War II. Because of the ancient code of honor, called "Besa," Albanians—most of whom were Muslim, but also Roman Catholic, Orthodox Christian, and Jew—were morally compelled, and even competed with each other, to save European Jewry from Nazi extermination.

I am proud that Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem, commemorated this uniquely Albanian response to Jewish suffering in a public ceremony in November 2007. Now, five years later, I am pleased that you are highlighting the saving role of Albanians in the Capitol of the United States. I am also pleased to learn that the Albanian American Civic League, in conjunction with the Kosova-Israel Friendship Association, will be revealing the instrumental part that Albanians in Kosova played in protecting Jews in Nazi-occupied Yugoslavia and ensuring their safe passage into Albania.

I want to commend the Albanian American Civic League and Foundation for their historic work over more than two decades in bringing international attention to Albanian humanity and heroism during the Holocaust.

Please accept my prayerful and heartfelt good wishes to you and to all of your distinguished guests.

בכבוד רב,

הרב חיים המדינר  
ראש הלשכה

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## Time to Recognize Kosovo

Four years ago this Friday, on Friday, February 17, 2008, the Republic of Kosovo declared its independence. This move, which followed years of failed international efforts to broker a compromise settlement between Kosovo and Serbia, won wide international recognition by all the major Western powers, including the United States, Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom and France. Not, however, by Israel. Indeed, four years later, Israel has yet to recognize the Balkan republic. And while there are undoubtedly more pressing issues on Jerusalem's foreign policy agenda, its failure to recognize Kosovo constitutes not only a needless diplomatic error, but a moral and historical failing as well.

It is a needless diplomatic error because, contrary to what Jerusalem thinks, such recognition will not undermine its own strategic interests. In fact, it might even advance them. The source of the error lies in a misplaced anxiety that, since Kosovo is often compared to Palestine, the diplomatic standing of the former might have dangerous implications for Jerusalem on the latter. The most anxiety-inducing implications concern the following:

- A Palestinian unilateral declaration of independence: The Palestinians have threatened to declare their independence, and in the past year have sought to obtain international recognition for their statehood. Jerusalem fears that the case of Kosovo makes for a dangerous precedent, and that its own recognition of the Balkan republic would undercut its case against Palestinian independence.
- Internal Palestinian secession: Jerusalem worries that recognition of Kosovo might help establish a universally applicable precedent for unilateral secession, one that could encourage Israel's internal Palestinian minority in, say, the Galilee, to secede. (On this, Jerusalem is not alone: Other countries that have withheld recognition from Kosovo - notably within the European Union: Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Slovakia and Romania - all share the same anxiety. )
- The validity of an internationally imposed solution: Since Kosovo's independence was imposed on Serbia from the outside, Jerusalem is apprehensive lest a perception of success on Kosovo bolster the resolve of the international community to try and impose a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this context, Israel's recognition of Kosovo might undermine its long-held resistance to such a diplomatic initiative.

There are other types of anxieties as well, including the deeply phobic one that recognition of a predominantly Muslim republic would boost the spread of global Islam. As one right-wing member of Knesset argued in the Hebrew press following Kosovo's declaration in 2008, "The flag of Kosovo is that of Islamic proliferation and a source of serious anxiety to Europe."

Jerusalem's non-recognition of Kosovo, in other words, has not been a function of a simple diplomatic lapse. It reflects instead a deliberate decision, one fueled by deep anxieties of various kinds. As it happens, these anxieties are entirely misplaced.

For one thing, as Jerusalem should know all too well, international diplomacy is primarily a function of high politics, not legal precedence. As the past few months alone have demonstrated, the case of Kosovo has had no bearing on the Palestinian bid for international recognition, not even in the wake of the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion that Kosovo's declaration of independence did not violate international law. Israel's leading friends in the international community - which, incidentally, were also the first to recognize Kosovo - opposed the Palestinian bid at the United Nations Security Council.

Even Albania, whose commitment to Kosovo is rooted in a shared ethnic identity (Kosovo's population is overwhelmingly ethnically Albanian ) and which lobbies on its behalf on the world stage, has had no qualms about coming out against the Palestinian bid. The Albanian prime minister publicly announced as much on a visit to Israel this past November. The irrelevance of the Kosovo case for the Palestinian UN bid has gone in the opposite direction as well. Some of the very powers that supported Palestine's statehood bid remain adamantly opposed to Kosovo's independence, not least Russia and China, the main opponents of Kosovo's admission to the United Nations in the Security Council.

Incidentally, this alone should ring alarm bells in Jerusalem: Although no Western power is likely to bother to convey its "disgust" at the failure of these nations to recognize Kosovo, Jerusalem should be cognizant of the camp it has joined.

For the case of Kosovo is ultimately a moral and historical one, and Jerusalem's failure on this score, therefore, is all the more regrettable. Arising out of one of the worst genocidal atrocities on the European continent since World War II, Kosovo's demand for self-determination is one that Israel cannot afford to ignore. If anything, a country that never fails to invoke the Holocaust to justify its existence should have been at the forefront of the international campaign to recognize Kosovo's independence. To mark Kosovo's fourth anniversary, Israel has an opportunity to right a wrong and to recognize Kosovo. It is an act that Israel owes not only to Kosovo; it owes it also to the Jewish people.

**Yonatan Touval is a foreign policy analyst and member of the board at Mitvim: The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies.**

# What Have We Learned From the Holocaust?

By Joseph DioGuardi

When we hear the word "Holocaust," images of mass murder, concentration camps, persecution of people based on religion and ethnicity, the Nuremberg trials, genocide and the photographs of emaciated, tortured, and faceless bodies dumped into mass graves come to mind.

We remember the horrors of the Nazi barbarity, acts so unconscionable that we cannot believe that they were committed by human beings, let alone in the middle of the 20th century. One might assume that we can be thankful that the United States and the rest of the world learned enough from the Nazi era to ensure that it would never occur again. After all, the Jewish community has repeated its slogan of "Never Again!" for 50 years.

But, sadly, this is not the case. The United States and Europe sat by and watched innocent people in Bosnia raped, tortured and killed, while the Serbian aggressors seemed to be operating from some Hitlerian guide to war and genocide.

By the time we finally decided that it was time to intervene in Bosnia, our wait-and-see attitude had cost hundreds of thousands of lives and the displacement of over a million people. Again in the 20th century, we saw prisoner camps. We saw images in the papers and on television screens of mass graves. For the first time since the Nuremberg trials, a tribunal was convened to bring to justice those responsible for war crimes in Bosnia. The precedent cited by the prosecutors was the slaughter that caused so many to weep 50 years earlier.

Incredibly, we have seen similar crimes in Kosova, and what makes it so disturbing is that it has again happened in the Balkans and that once again the crimes are being perpetrated by the Serbian forces under the direction of the brutal architect of the

Bosnian war, Slobodan Milosevic. One would have thought that after scores of Albanian civilians were slaughtered in Drenice in March, NATO would have immediately stopped the Serbian aggressors. After all, the wounds of Bosnia were still fresh, but beginning to heal a little with the help of NATO forces.

But this was not the case. While President Clinton insisted during a press conference that the world would not

## The lessons of genocide have not been studied

tolerate such acts, and while his words were echoed by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, our special envoys to the Balkans, Ambassadors Richard Holbrooke and Robert Gelbard, the leaders of our NATO allies and Secretary General Kofi Annan, the White House again appeared to avert its eyes while a brutal dictator committed unspeakable acts against a civilian population. Incredibly, our foreign policy as stated last spring was that no course of action was being ruled out and that President Bush's "Christmas Warning," repeated by Clinton, clearly stated that we would not tolerate Serbian aggression in Kosova.

It would be unfair if I did not cite the fact that the United States and its allies have been conducting aggressive diplomacy and working on military options since March and that there are economic sanctions in force against the Belgrade regime. But the fact remains that the brutal conflict has continued until very recently, negotiations have gone on with only meager results and Kosovar Albanians have been murdered and forced to flee their homes. We have been forced to witness wanton and willful destruction of people and property on a scale reminiscent of the Bosnian war. And, in spite of every tough statement that the U.S. has made about war crimes, the barbaric acts of

Milosevic and our resolve not to sit idly by in the face of mass killing, the United States has failed to act forcefully while Milosevic has continued the second wave of his campaign of "ethnic cleansing" and genocide against the Albanian people.

On April 22, 1993, President Clinton, speaking at the dedication of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., stated:

"The Holocaust began when the most civilized country of its day unleashed unprecedented acts of cruelty and hatred abetted by perversions of science, philosophy and law ... Millions died for who they were, how they worshipped, what they believed, and whom they loved. But one people — the Jews — were immutably marked for their total destruction ... They who threatened no one were slaughtered by an efficient, unrelenting bureaucracy, dedicated solely to a radical evil ... The Holocaust reminds us forever that knowledge divorced from values can only serve to deepen the human nightmare, that a head without a heart is not humanity."

President Clinton further stated: "We learn again and again that the world has yet to run its course of animosity and violence ... Ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia is but the most brutal and blatant and ever-present manifestation of what we see."

Five years after President Clinton's remarks at the Holocaust Museum, barbaric acts reminiscent of the Nazi horrors have continued in Kosova.

Not stopping the carnage, as we pledged to, makes us just as guilty as the war criminals who perpetrated crimes against humanity.

If Milosevic fails to keep pledges made to Ambassador Holbrooke this week, force must be used to put an end to Milosevic's reign of terror in the Balkans and to demonstrate our moral leadership in foreign policy and redeem America's national honor.

*Joseph DioGuardi is a former congressman and president of the Albanian American Civic League.*