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**A POSTMORTEM OF THE HOLOCAUST IN HUNGARY: A PROBING
INTERPRETATION OF THE CAUSES**

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POLITICAL SCIENCE AT THE GRADUATE CENTER OF THE CITY
UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK**

Good evening, and welcome to the 18th Monna and Otto Weinmann Annual Lecture. The Weinmann Lecture is made possible through the generosity of Janice Weinman Shorenstein and is organized each year by the Museum's Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies. I am Paul Shapiro, Director of the Center.

I would like to acknowledge the presence here this evening of the Deputy Chief of Mission of the Embassy of Hungary, Mr. Andras Bacs-Nagy; extend a special thank you to Congresswoman Shelley Berkley of the State of Nevada and to Ambassador Douglas Davidson, the State Department's Special Envoy for Holocaust Affairs, for being with us; and also recognize Dr. Erika Schlager, whose outstanding work as Senior Staff of the U.S. Helsinki Commission in the Congress continues to focus the attention of members of the Congress and the general public on manifestations of antisemitism, anti-Romani prejudice, and other threats to democracy as they appear in Europe and elsewhere.

A word of public appreciation for Janice Weinman Shorenstein and her family. Janice Weinman Shorenstein endowed this lecture in 1995 as a tribute to her parents, Monna and Otto Weinmann and to honor all Holocaust survivors. It was Janice's early commitment to survivors and to scholarship here at America's national institution for the documentation, study, and teaching about the Holocaust, that has enabled us each year to invite the world's leading scholars—some of whom were themselves witnesses to Nazi terror—to share their research and insights in this public forum. We are delighted to have Janice Weinman Shorenstein and her family with us tonight. I am pleased to invite Janice to the podium to say a few words.....

In a moment, I will introduce one of the true founders and true leaders in the field of Holocaust studies. No person has done as much to explore the history of the Holocaust in Hungary as Professor Randolph Brahm, and his dozens of publications reach far beyond his native Hungary as well. But before making that introduction, let me say a few words about Hungary, not Hungary of the Holocaust era, but Hungary today.

In late 2008, at a European regional conference of over 20 governments on antisemitism, concern was expressed about the reappearance in contemporary Hungary of some fascist symbols of the former Hungarian Arrow Cross movement and increasing incidents of antisemitic intimidation and violence. Especially disturbing was the failure of the then out-of-power, but former government party Fidesz to join in forceful condemnation of the public display of fascist symbols by storm-trooper-like uniformed members of a radical fringe movement. Fidesz was a major force in Hungarian political life, and had played a role in the creation, on Pava Street in Budapest, of an important Holocaust Memorial and Documentation Center, where difficult issues of the Holocaust in Hungary were presented in a straightforward and accurate manner in an excellent main exhibition.

Unfortunately, following Fidesz's return to power in 2010, concern about the warning signs apparent in 2008 proved to be justified. I have had several opportunities to speak frankly on behalf of the Museum with some key figures in the Fidesz-led government of Hungary, including some individuals who have played roles in shaping the ways in which the Hungarian government is dealing with its Holocaust history. One constant message has been that because this Museum praised publicly some actions taken by former post-communist governments of Hungary, including the first Fidesz government, efforts to trivialize or distort the history of the Holocaust, to give rein to antisemitic manifestations in the country, or to otherwise move away from the kind of open discourse about this challenging topic that would characterize a free and democratic society, would also be addressed publicly by the Museum.

Last week, the Museum issued a press release expressing grave concern about the rehabilitation of fascist ideologues and political leaders from World War II that is taking place in Hungary. Our Director, Sara Bloomfield called it "both a grave insult to the memory of those who perished under the Horthy and Szalasi regimes and a deeply troubling sign for Jews and other minorities in Hungary." She called on the leaders of Hungary to "unequivocally renounce all forms of antisemitism and racism and to reject every effort to honor individuals responsible for the genocide of Europe's Jews." You

may have read also that our Founding Chairman, Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel, last week repudiated a high decoration conferred on him by Hungary to protest these same trends.

This evening, with the indulgence of Professor Braham, who is with us only because he escaped from a Jewish Labor Battalion organized by the government of then Hungarian Chief of State Miklos Horthy, I want to reiterate our expression of concern and outrage.

Let me review for you briefly some of the causes of our concern. Some of them will sound eerily familiar and ominous to those among you who, like Professor Braham, experienced the precursors and the horrors of the Holocaust.

The Fidesz government has enacted laws to place restrictions on the media. I invite you to visit our current exhibition on Nazi propaganda and Nazi manipulation of the media if you need a reminder of the danger to democracy that this represents. The Fidesz government has taken steps to politicize the judiciary. Recall, please, the enforcement of antisemitic laws in Nazi Germany by that controlled judiciary. Just two weeks ago, Freedom House reported that the Hungarian government's actions have "affected institutions that form the bedrock of democratically accountable systems, including independent courts and media." Hungary's law on religion enacted last year stripped hundreds of religions of their legal status, making the legitimacy of religious faith subject to nationalist political whim. For Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others, the echo of the Holocaust era could not be more powerful. Racial violence, including outright murder, against the Romani minority, while not perpetrated by the government, has not been effectively addressed by the government either, and it is likely that those who are responsible draw encouragement and a sense of empowerment from the nationalist and xenophobic tenor of government messaging, especially when coupled with, rather than firmly rejecting, the even more radical voice of Jobbik, an openly antisemitic, anti-Roma party that received 16 percent of the national vote in 2010.

And what about the Holocaust itself? Is that history secure? In recent months, three major Holocaust-related monuments in Budapest—the Holocaust Memorial and Documentation Center, the statue of Raoul Wallenberg, and the bronze shoes on the banks of the Danube which memorialize the 10,000 or more Jews shot into the river during the final months of the war—have been vandalized. Assaults on Jewish institutions and members of the Jewish community have become more common, which is an outgrowth, in my opinion, of the government's attempts to revise Hungary's Holocaust history, lay blame on the victims and exonerate the perpetrators.

Proposals have been made by government representatives to sanitize the history shown in the exhibition at the Holocaust Memorial and Documentation Center on Pava Street, specifically to eliminate mention of Miklos Horthy's alliance with Adolf Hitler to disrupt the peace of Europe and participate in the dismemberment of neighboring states—Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia. The Jews of these regions were the first targets of the Hungarian gendarmerie and police as they drove into ghettos and then delivered to the Germans and to death in Auschwitz hundreds of thousands of innocent Jewish men, women and children who had the misfortune to find themselves under Hungarian administration. The strong suggestion has also been made to adjust the Memorial's exhibition to whitewash this enthusiastic Hungarian collaboration and to place full blame on Nazi Germany alone.

Hand in hand with the effort to justify Admiral Horthy's alliance with Hitler and assault on Hungary's neighbors has appeared in ever more strident ultra-nationalist terms a call for the unity of all ethnic Hungarians living today in surrounding states. Will Hungary again become a source of instability in the heart of the European Union? Enter any government office, school, shop, or souvenir stand and you will encounter maps and souvenirs of every kind showing not modern Hungary, but the Hungarian half of pre-World War I Austria-Hungary, including parts of today's Romania, Slovakia, Croatia and Ukraine. Imagine the reaction if maps in Germany included what is today western Poland and the wartime Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, or if maps in Russia included all former Soviet republics, now independent states.

And hand in hand with whitewashing Hungarian collaboration and complicity during the Holocaust has gone a growing effort to rehabilitate the murderers. Last year, an effort was made to rehabilitate convicted war criminal Albert Wass, when the incoming president of Hungary quoted Wass in his inaugural address. Just recently, the Speaker of the Hungarian Parliament Laszlo Kover, the Hungarian State Secretary for Culture Geza Szocs, and Gabor Vona, the leader of the extremist Jobbik party, united in honoring Jozsef Nyiro, a fascist ideologue, member of parliament and vice-chair of the Education Commission in the Arrow-Cross regime of war criminal Ferenc Szalasi. Jozsef Nyiro had characterized Josef Goebbels as someone who "exudes intellect and genius with his whole being;" and in parliament labeled what he called the "discredited liberal Jewish heritage" the enemy of Hungary; and showing race hatred in all directions, called Hungarian marriages with non-Hungarians "mutt marriages" or "mule marriages." The newspaper that Nyiro published, *Magyar Erő*, declared that "Getting rid of the Jews is not a mere sign of the times,... but a unified and pressing demand of

all nations....” The carefully developed plan this past month was to rebury Nyiro’s ashes in Transylvania, whipping up nationalistic sentiment among ethnic Hungarians there through an elaborate official funerary procession wending its way by train from the Hungarian border into Romania. The Romanian government protested, there was no train, but the officials I have mentioned still participated in a disturbing, if unofficial, burial ceremony. This incident was not quite the equivalent of Admiral Horthy on his white horse leading the Hungarian army into Transylvania, as happened in 1940. But symbolically, the intent and the violation of a neighbor was the same.

Finally, we must deal with Horthy himself. Several municipalities in Hungary have announced plans to erect statues honoring him or have already done so. The government has labeled these “local initiatives” and has refused to take steps to stop the rehabilitation of a man responsible for antisemitic violence and antisemitic laws starting in 1920 and culminating in the Holocaust. What do you think is the intended message?

Is the echo of the 1930s and the Holocaust in today’s Hungary alarming? Are contemporary developments appropriate in a state that is a member of the International Task Force on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, a member of the European Union, and a member of NATO? These questions relate to Holocaust memory, to peace and values inside the European Union, and to values and structures that involve our own national defense. I leave it to you to judge.

Now, with thanks for his patience, it is my honor to introduce Professor Randolph Braham, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, where he also serves as Director of the Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies. Professor Braham pioneered the study of the Holocaust in Hungary, the topic of his lecture this evening. Professor Braham’s publications, in both English and Hungarian, span half a century, starting with *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry: A documentary account* (1963); and including his magisterial 2-volume *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary* (1981). Most recently he has authored *The Auschwitz Reports and the Holocaust in Hungary* (2011) and *The Geographic Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary*, which is forthcoming and will be published in partnership with this Museum. Professor Braham has received more awards and honors than I can enumerate here. He served on the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, which was chaired by Elie Wiesel. The library of the Holocaust Memorial and Documentation Center in Budapest bears his name, and late Representative Tom Lantos of California—himself a

Holocaust survivor from Hungary—recognized Professor Braham’s accomplishments on the floor of the House of Representatives on March 17, 2004. Dr. Braham served for nearly two decades as a member of this Museum’s Academic Committee. A survivor of the infamous Hungarian Jewish Labor Battalions, Professor Braham’s contributions to memory and to study of the Holocaust are uniquely powerful and authoritative.

This evening, Professor Braham’s Weinmann Lecture is entitled “**A postmortem of the Holocaust in Hungary: A probing interpretation of the causes.**” The lecture will be followed by a question-and-answer period. If you have a question, please come to the microphone in the right aisle of the theater. I ask you now to kindly turn off cell phones and other noise-making electronic devices, and join me in welcoming Professor Randolph Braham to the podium.