“We should never think that it is finished. With imagination, with passion, with fervor, begin again. It's up to you now, that my past does not become your future.”

— ELIE WIESEL
Honorary Campaign Chairman 2009–2016
With the recent loss of Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, I’ve thought a lot about my very first meeting with him 30 years ago and all that we shared since then.

There have been numerous reflections about his remarkable legacy as an influential thinker, author, teacher, and activist. In addition to these enduring contributions, another must be added: institution builder. Without him, it is hard to imagine the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. This is not only because he led the 1978–79 presidential commission that recommended the creation of the Museum and then went on to serve for six years as the founding chairman of the governing council that would oversee its development. Equally consequential, he imagined a very particular mission for the Museum that only he had the moral authority to envision and the precision of language to powerfully articulate.

Creating a “Living Memorial”

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Today, the Museum embodies that bold and ambitious mission, but the struggle for what some felt was the soul of the institution was not without debate and controversy in those early years. Ultimately, due to the power of his moral clarity, intellect, and eloquence, it was Elie’s vision that would carry the day.

I first met Elie in 1986 shortly after I joined the staff of the project to build the Museum. It was at a meeting of the presidentially appointed United States Holocaust Memorial Council. I nervously anticipated meeting the renowned Elie Wiesel, who had not only authored *Night* (according to the *New York Times* “a slim volume of terrifying power”) but had also recently been named as the Nobel Peace Prize laureate. As it turned out, my apprehension was misplaced. Elie was warm and welcoming to me. But he threw the meeting into chaos when he announced to the group that he would be stepping down from the chairmanship of the Council, believing that it was the right time for others to bring the project to fruition.

Over the next six years, Elie would emerge as a giant on the world stage, a symbol of the Holocaust and a universal voice of conscience. During that same period, a talented team would create the Museum’s Permanent Exhibition and in the process frequently debate the fundamental questions Elie had identified at the very outset.

**A Mission for All Time**

The outset was 1978, when President Jimmy Carter formed a commission, chaired by Elie, and charged it with the preparation of a report “with respect to the establishment and maintenance of an appropriate memorial to those who perished in the Holocaust.” The commission determined that memory alone was insufficient. Education was also required. Education about the events of the Holocaust—decisions and actions, causes and consequences, lessons and legacies. But that led to a set of questions about the narrative of the exhibition and the role of the Museum itself. Was it to be “Jewish” or “universal”? Was it to be solely about remembrance and education, or also a call to action?
At a meeting of the commission in February 1979, Elie stated:

The real discussion today, the substantive discussion, centered around the question: Was the Holocaust a universal event, or solely a Jewish, and therefore, unique one? My answer: It was both. If we are to remember the Holocaust, it is not only because of the dead; it’s too late for them. Nor only because of the survivors; it may be too late for them. Our remembering is an act of generosity...extended to all others. Our remembering aims at saving as many men and women as possible from apathy to evil, if not from evil itself.

However, this universalist approach threatened to diminish the reality of this specifically Jewish event for some of the survivors, who were understandably still haunted by their horrific experiences from a mere three decades earlier.

In the end, the Permanent Exhibition would reflect Elie’s vision of “both”—the specificity of Holocaust history presented in ways that illuminate timeless lessons. Indeed the language of the 1979 President’s Commission report would turn out to be an apt description of both the exhibition and the institution itself as, in his words, a “living memorial”:

We wish through the work of this commission to reach and transform as many human beings as possible. We hope to share our conviction that when war and genocide unleash hatred against any one people or peoples, all are ultimately engulfed in the fire....

To remember the Holocaust is to sensitize ourselves to its critical political lessons. Nazism was facilitated by the breakdown of democracy, the collapse of social and economic cohesion, the decline of human solidarity, and an erosion of faith in the political leadership and in the ability of democratic governments to function.

In 1993, 14 years after those words were written, Elie’s speech at the Museum’s dedication would embody the idea of a living memorial. In the context of speaking about his beloved mother and the world’s failure to save her and the Jews of Europe, Elie, standing before thousands of Holocaust survivors and others, turned to a newly elected President Bill Clinton, and said:

Mr. President, I cannot not tell you something. I have been in the former Yugoslavia last fall. I cannot sleep since for what I have seen. As a Jew I am saying that we must do something to stop the bloodshed in that country! People fight each other and children die. Why? Something, anything must be done.
Three years later Elie would significantly advance the Museum’s role as a living memorial when he launched a key recommendation of the President’s Commission report that had been deferred: the Committee on Conscience, whose role was to address “the need to ensure that such a totally inhuman assault as the Holocaust—or any partial version thereof—never recurs.” In 1996, standing in the memorial space—the Hall of Remembrance—of the completed Museum building, Elie referred to the “long overdue” effort to create the Committee on Conscience. One of the most powerful ways to honor the memory of the victims of the Holocaust would be to call attention to genocidal threats today—and to do so in their name. The Museum was precisely the place to do it.

Harking back to his admonition to President Clinton, Elie said:

Some people claim that precisely because the Museum is about a unique tragedy we must not use it to denounce other injustices. A case in point: When in my address at the inauguration ceremony of this Museum I pleaded with President Clinton to do something for Sarajevo, I was criticized by a distinguished columnist. He said that I shouldn’t have evoked Sarajevo on this “sacred” ground. Well—this ground is not sacred. It is important, informative, and instructive—it is all that and more… We are duty bound to listen to the voice of our conscience. The question is only how we formulate its advice and commandments. We must be careful when we relate other tragedies to our own. In other words, a reference to Auschwitz is possible and permissible: an analogy to Treblinka is not.

And he concluded with this harsh reminder: “Killers always have more power than their victims. But we too have power—the power of conscience.”
Elie made sure he was at the Museum when the call to conscience was needed. In 2007, he was present when President George W. Bush gave a policy speech on the genocide in Darfur and announced new steps to confront the ongoing atrocities perpetrated by the Sudanese government against some of its ethnic minorities.

In 2012, President Barack Obama invoked his visit with Elie to Buchenwald before announcing the formation of the US government’s first-ever interagency Atrocities Prevention Board. Elie took that occasion to remind the world yet again of one of the Museum’s central messages: The Holocaust was preventable. “We must know that when evil has power it is almost too late. Preventative measures are important. We must use those measures to prevent another catastrophe.”

Holocaust memory in all its singularity stands—and always will—at the heart of the Museum. But if memory has a purpose, then understanding the past should help us do better at shaping the future.

My very last meeting with Elie was to discuss the Museum’s Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide. As Elie said at the dedication ceremony, “the Museum is not an answer, it is a question mark.” The institution is and provokes many questions. Thanks to Elie Wiesel, the question of whether the Museum should be a living memorial is no longer one of them.

“Is there hope in memory? There must be. Without hope, memory would be morbid and sterile. Without memory, hope would be empty of meaning, and above all, empty of gratitude.”

—ELIE WIESEL
“If Auschwitz didn’t cure the world of antisemitism, what can and what will? . . . One thing is clear. Antisemitism is not the only factor that produced Auschwitz, but it is sure that without antisemitism, there would have been no Auschwitz. Don’t people understand that?” —ELIE WIESEL IN 2006

CONFRONTING THE LONGEST HATRED

ANTISEMITISM IS SOMETIMES CALLED “THE LONGEST HATRED”—it is global, ingrained, and resilient. It affects everyone and can exist even where there are no Jews. Given its alarming rise in recent years, especially in the lands where the Holocaust occurred, the Museum’s William Levine Family Institute for Holocaust Education hired Tad Stahnke, an internationally recognized expert on religion and human rights, to build a program that would help counter Holocaust denial and state-sponsored antisemitism. Prior to joining the Museum a year ago, Stahnke had researched antisemitism in Europe for the organization Human Rights First.

“In Europe, Jews are again dying because they’re Jews,” Stahnke reported in June to the United States Holocaust Memorial Council’s Committee on Holocaust Denial and State-Sponsored Antisemitism. While antisemitism is not state-sponsored in Europe as it was in the 1930s, “denial and distortion of the Holocaust are part of the narrative that is driving these problems. We don’t want ignorance or misuse of the Holocaust to be promoting violent antisemitism.”
URGENT PROBLEMS, NEW APPROACHES

The Museum’s new strategy draws upon the institution’s unique advantages, such as its expertise in educating diverse audiences about the Holocaust, its federal status, and its international stature, to reach two groups of people—young adults ages 18–35 in Europe and the Middle East who may be susceptible to violent antisemitism and those with influence over them. The strategy rests on three pillars:

1. Building partnerships with people and institutions who reach young adults in Europe and the Middle East
2. Developing a corps of influencers who don’t just understand the problem, but will speak out about it
3. Being a leading voice on contemporary antisemitism as it relates to the Holocaust

While the strategy is new, it rests upon resources and expertise the Museum has developed over two decades, including an online presence in 15 languages and educational materials that address the roots of antisemitism. Some of those resources were recently on display in Paris in the Museum’s traveling exhibition State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda, which was designed to teach about the dangers of propaganda and mass communications in the digital age. It was so successful at engaging audiences that it will reopen in January 2017 in the public square outside Paris’s city hall. Plans are in the works for the exhibition to then travel to other cities around France.

Many French school groups toured State of Deception, including students of Samia Essabaa, a French woman of Moroccan and Tunisian descent. Her students represent an even broader tapestry, with parents from West Africa, North Africa, the Caribbean, and beyond. Alarmed by rising antisemitism among her students, Essabaa has been teaching them about the Holocaust, believing that they need to learn to “not accept someone to speak badly of the Jewish community or any community because they are different.”

As students learned about Nazi-era propaganda, they began to make connections to hate speech today—realizing that making generalizations about a group of people can be dangerous, said Aleisa Fishman, a Museum historian working with Stahnke in the Levine Institute. “We are contributing to the conversation today by talking about what we know best—the Holocaust,” said Fishman, who is also the host of the Museum’s long-running Voices on Antisemitism podcast.

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“The positive reception of State of Deception in France exemplifies the influence the Museum can have in reaching our target audiences with information and ideas relevant to them.”

“We are contributing to the conversation today by talking about what we know best—the Holocaust.”

—ALEISA FISHMAN
“Government and political leaders can misuse the history of the Holocaust to promote violence against Jews. We won’t hesitate to use the Museum’s voice to call that out when it occurs.”

—TAD STAHNKE

REACHING GERMANY’S TURKISH COMMUNITY

The Museum recognizes that it cannot effect significant change just with exhibitions and educational resources; nor can it do that alone. Local organizations in Europe and the Middle East that have influence in communities where violent antisemitism can fester play an important role in the strategy. The Museum can help empower those organizations and individuals to prevent and condemn antisemitic acts. In Berlin, where rising antisemitism has a particularly worrisome resonance, one group uses the city’s Jewish history to counter hatred.

The Kreuzberg Initiative Against Antisemitism (KIGA) was started by Germans of Turkish descent in 2004 after some Turkish-German youth committed antisemitic acts in Berlin at the very same time such attacks were perpetrated in Istanbul. Since then, KIGA has worked to understand the attitudes that led to the attacks and how to counter them. The group’s program empowers youth to work with younger peers, challenging their assumptions in part by teaching them about the Jews who once lived in and were deported from their neighborhoods. The Museum would struggle to reach this audience on its own, but it can work with KIGA to amplify the group’s message.

“In working with the Museum, we see an opportunity to further expand our reach,” said KIGA Chairman Dervis Hizarci. “You approaching us was an empowering, motivating event.” He and a colleague visited the Museum in June to learn about its approach—a visit that Hizarci said confirmed KIGA’s decision to tailor its message for different, interfaith audiences. Its workshops already have reached more than 6,000 German teenagers; with the Museum’s support, KIGA plans to expand its program to other areas of Germany.

CONFRONTING THE IRANIAN REGIME

In contrast to the long-term goals represented by the Museum’s work with KIGA and other partners, the team aims to have an immediate impact by speaking out on contemporary antisemitism. In 2015, the Iran House of Cartoon and the Sarcheshmeh Cultural Complex in Iran announced the second international Holocaust cartoon competition. Following that, the Museum began researching the contest and commissioned a background paper from an Iranian-born writer. After Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tried to distance the government from the contest in an April 2016 New Yorker interview, the Museum was able to swiftly respond with facts—in English and Farsi—to counter his assertion that the contest had no official support or endorsement.

In interviews with journalists, Stahnke demonstrated that the Iranian government bore responsibility for the contest via its approach—a visit that Hizarci said confirmed KIGA’s decision to tailor its message for different, interfaith audiences. Its workshops already have reached more than 6,000 German teenagers; with the Museum’s support, KIGA plans to expand its program to other areas of Germany.

The team also has produced 160 episodes of the Voices on Antisemitism podcast as well as the related Confronting Hatred public radio special, which aired on 320 stations nationwide, including the top ten radio markets.

“Everything is on the table,” Stahnke said. “Hatred is a virus that can’t be contained; it infects whole societies,” Stahnke said. “That’s why everyone should care about unchecked antisemitism, and that’s our aspiration.”

EDUCATING AMERICAN AUDENCES

While focusing on approaches to counter violent antisemitism abroad, the Museum is taking advantage of ongoing opportunities to educate audiences at home. A new film on antisemitism since the end of World War II is on view in the Museum in connection with the exhibition A Dangerous Lie: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion and is online at ushmm.org/antisemitism-today. “The film emphasizes that antisemitism did not end with the defeat of the Nazis—a common misconception among American audiences,” Fishman said. “It has in fact taken on new and deadly forms, including demonization of Israel.”

The team’s educational work has produced two public radio specials, which aired on 936 stations nationwide, including the top ten radio markets.

“The events of the Holocaust teach that while hatred first targeted the Jews, it didn’t end there. Hatred is a virus that can’t be contained; it infects whole societies,” Stahnke said. “That’s why everyone should care about unchecked antisemitism, and that’s our aspiration.”

The Museum’s Antisemitism Initiative has received substantial support from The Elizabeth and Oliver Shanter Foundation and Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Pull and the Pull Family Foundation, with additional support from Elaine and Alan Archer. The traveling exhibition State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda was underwritten in part by grants from Katherine M. and Leo S. Ullman, The Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation, and Sol and Mitzi Center, with additional support from the Lester Robbins and Sheila Johnson Robbins Traveling and Special Exhibitions Fund Established in 1990. The exhibition A Dangerous Lie: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion and the Museum’s Gonda Education Center is made possible by generous support from Eric F.* and Lore* Ross, and is supported in part by the Lester Robbins* and Sheila Johnson Robbins Traveling and Special Exhibitions Fund Established in 1990. The traveling exhibition State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda in English and Farsi—to counter his assertion that the contest had no official support or endorsement.

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MOUAZ MOUSTAFA, 31, a Syrian who immigrated to the United States as a boy, has worked in partnership with the Museum to raise awareness of mass atrocities in his native country. At the National Tribute Dinner in May, he spoke with Director Sara Bloomfield. The following are excerpts of their conversation.

BLOOMFIELD: We first met you in 2014, when you came to the Museum on one of the most memorable days of my life. Tell us about the images you brought to us.

MOUSTAFA: The Museum was the first place we could think of to bring these horrific images (following page). Through my work we were introduced to a forensic photographer for the Assad regime’s military police. Early on in the revolution, he was asked to take photographs of innocent civilians who were tortured to death in and around Damascus. He took a total of 55,000 photographs over a period of two and a half years. And this very brave man, whom we call “Caesar” to protect his identity, eventually fled and was able to bring the photographs with him, to show the world what is happening in Syria. We are so grateful that the Museum and its Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide have been able to draw the world’s attention to them—in an exhibition at the Museum, in a display on Capitol Hill, and through news coverage and social media outreach.

BLOOMFIELD: You lead the Syrian Emergency Task Force, which is working to alleviate suffering in Syria, where more than 400,000 people have been killed since violence broke out in 2011. But your organization is also actively working to build democracy there. Can you tell us about that?

MOUSTAFA: At the National Tribute Dinner in May, he spoke with Director Sara Bloomfield. The following are excerpts of their conversation.
MOUSTAFA: Our work on the ground in Syria focuses on nurturing the civilian governing structures that are rising up in the contested and liberated areas of the country. People have fought for their freedom at great personal risk and loss, so we try to support local civilian governing councils to make sure that terrorist groups, extremists, or warlords aren’t the ones who come in to fill the administrative vacuum.

In the course of our work for democracy, by the way, we’ve lost two members of our staff to the Assad regime, who were tortured to death; two others were taken by ISIS and killed.

BLOOMFIELD: What role has Iran played in the Syrian conflict?

MOUSTAFA: Since the beginning of this conflict, despite crippling sanctions, Iran has supported the Assad regime. Iran called for its proxy, Hezbollah, to enter Syria and to supplement the regime’s army in killing and going after civilian populations, civil society, and civilian councils. And as they did this, we were in awe, because the Syrian people always believed that their supporters in the West, in the free world, wouldn’t let us fight alone against this dictator.

We see the Russians also supporting the Syrian regime. The Syrian people are fighting two extremist forces: a dictator supported by Shiite extremists and the Russians, plus the terrorist groups ISIS and al-Qaeda.

There’s a mutual understanding, I would say, between extremists like ISIS or Hezbollah to go after the moderate Muslims and others from this beautiful mosaic of ethnic backgrounds in Syria because they don’t want people who want a civilian, pluralist, democratic state.

BLOOMFIELD: Can you talk about the impact of the Museum’s work?

MOUSTAFA: One of the most heartbreaking things, talking to people who are living in the midst of a horrendous war, is when they tell me the world has deserted us, forgotten us—our blood is just simply not enough to care about.

But this institution, the Museum, changes that. You should see Syrians’ reactions when they witness the Museum’s efforts to bring awareness. It’s almost as important as giving them food or water or sheltering them from bombs. It means the world to them that somebody out there has not forgotten them, that people have connected with them on a human level.

This place supersedes politics; it builds bridges; and it allows for the possibility that we may see a Middle East that is safe and stable with everyone living together in peace.

LEARN MORE ushmm.org/syria

Rescuing Judaica in Syria

One of the civilian councils that the Syrian Emergency Task Force supports is located in Jobar, a Damascus suburb that is home to the Eliyahu Hanavi Synagogue, which dates back to 720 BC.

After the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, members of the local council tried to protect the synagogue from looters and buried priceless Judaica—including rugs and Torah scrolls—for safekeeping. Because of their efforts, these artifacts were not damaged when the synagogue was shelled and destroyed in 2014, according to Moustafa.

“That’s who the real Syrian people are,” Moustafa explains. “They understand that this important Jewish history is also world history, and that is sacred to them.”
WHEN ASKED WHAT HIS HOPES WERE FOR THE MUSEUM’S IMPACT, Elie Wiesel responded, “Anyone entering it should not leave unchanged.” By any measure, the Museum’s world-class Permanent Exhibition, *The Holocaust*, has done precisely that for almost 25 years.

The late Jeshajahu (Shaike) Weinberg, the Museum’s visionary founding director, and his talented team created an exhibition that put the history and lessons of the Holocaust on the map in a fundamentally new way. Since opening in 1993, the Museum has challenged more than 40 million visitors—from heads of state to students—to think critically not just about the Holocaust, but the world and their role in it.

“Making this story accessible for the audience drove every decision Shaike made,” reflected Chief Program Officer Sarah Ogilvie, who joined the Permanent Exhibition team in 1989 as a photo researcher. “That’s our challenge now.”

Museum visitation has become increasingly diverse and visitors today have new expectations and less core knowledge of World War II and the Holocaust. “We must adapt to these changes in a 21st-century audience, especially young people, to make sure they find it as powerful and relevant for the next 25 years as when we first opened,” continued Ogilvie. “It requires innovating with new approaches to engage visitors before they enter the building, while they are here, and inspire them to continue learning after they leave.”

A $20 million gift from Allan and Shelley Holt of Washington, DC, one of the largest in the Museum’s history, will fund a complete revitalization of the “jewel in the crown” of the Museum, ensuring it remains a state-of-the-art educational experience. The revitalization will take advantage of access to new archives, recent historical research, and substantial collections acquired over the past quarter century. The objective is to focus on why the Holocaust happened and was allowed to happen. New scholarship provides crucial insights—on human motivation and decision making as well as on the failures of individuals, institutions, and governments—that shed light on how genocide became possible in a highly advanced, educated society with a democratic constitution.

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The next two years before the Museum’s 25th anniversary will be a pivotal period to work with Holocaust survivors and other eyewitnesses to build the collection and ensure their history is transmitted to future generations with power and authenticity through an updated exhibition.
MUSEUM VISITATION HAS CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY. TODAY ALL young visitors—our most important audience—were born after the Museum opened. And technology has fundamentally altered the ways they learn and communicate. Furthermore, there have been significant advances in what we know about why and how the Holocaust happened:

ACCESS TO ARCHIVES
The collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in the opening of previously inaccessible archives and an increased understanding of how more than 2 million Jews—men, women, and children—were taken in front of their neighbors, marched out of their towns and villages, and murdered one by one in the “Holocaust by bullets.”

NEW SCHOLARSHIP
As the world’s leading generator of new knowledge working with a new generation of scholars, the Museum has advanced pathbreaking research to deepen understanding of how and why the Holocaust happened.

NEW COLLECTIONS
The Museum’s race to rescue the evidence is providing a wealth of new material that can enhance the use of authentic documentation to tell the story in powerful new ways to new audiences.
Spectres of the Shoah: Film Screening of Claude Lanzmann: Spectres of the Shoah

Discover the arduous 12-year journey that led to the creation of Lanzmann’s documentary Shoah; a monumental film featuring more than 70 interviews. This HBO film focuses on the man behind the camera and the Museum’s commitment to preserving the Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection.

Monday, November 14
Temple De Hirsch Sinai
Seattle, WASHINGTON

A Relentless Pursuit: Bringing Holocaust Perpetrators to Justice
Is it ever too late to pay for a crime? Discover the “Nazi hunters” who refused to give up on pursuing and bringing Holocaust perpetrators to justice. Their work has set important precedents for how we punish crimes against humanity and genocide today.

Tuesday, December 13
B’nai Torah Congregation
Boca Raton, FLORIDA

Ina Levine Annual Lecture
The Polish Police: Collaboration in the Holocaust
What role did Polish police play in the brutal liquidation of ghettos? Ina Levine Invitational Scholar Jan Grabowski (University of Ottawa) contends that while the Polish “Blue” Police sometimes acted under German orders, at other times it demonstrated a surprising degree of agency.

Thursday, November 17
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Washington, DC

Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race
Explore the history of the early 20th-century international genetics movement and the complicity of physicians and scientists in Nazi racial policies. This exhibition challenges us to reflect on the present-day interest in genetic manipulation that promotes the possibilities of human perfection.

Ongoing
Ghetto Fighters’ House Museum
D. N. Western Galilee, ISRAEL

Nazi Persecution of Homosexuals 1933–1945
Through reproductions of historic photographs and documents, this exhibition explores the rationale, means, and impact of the Nazi regime’s persecution of homosexuals, which left thousands dead and shattered the lives of many more.

April 30–July 3, 2017
Florida Holocaust Museum
St. Petersburg, FLORIDA

A United States Army trial. US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration

State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda
The Nazis used propaganda to win broad voter support, implement radical programs, and justify war and mass murder. This exhibition highlights the power of propaganda and challenges us to actively question, analyze, and seek the truth.

through January 8, 2017
Bullock Texas State History Museum
Austin, TEXAS

American Jesse Owens competes in the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. Library of Congress

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum exhibitons program is supported in part by the Leiner Robbins* and Sheila Johnson Robbins Invitational Scholars Jan Grabowski (University of Ottawa) and Ina Levine Annual Lecture

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“We should never think that it is finished. With imagination, with passion, with fervor, begin again. It’s up to you now, that my past does not become your future.”

— Elie Wiesel
Honorary Campaign Chairman 2009–2016