

# Commemoration of the Mass Deportations from the Baltic States

Address by Dr. Gunārs Nāgels

*Latvian Centre, Sydney, Australia – 12 June 2011*

Honoured guests, consuls, ladies and gentlemen.

Today I will be telling you a story about a piece of soap and the washing away of crimes.

We all know why we are here today, so I do not need to try and impress you with a range of terrible statistics, but they will come anyway. However numbers are just numbers, and they often take our thoughts away from the individuals that these numbers represent.

But even the numbers do not tell us the full story. We have all been affected in some way, even if we have not ourselves had the *pleasure* of a free trip to Siberia. And the affect on our nations, even today, is immense.

The 14<sup>th</sup> of June, 1941, was in many ways a day much the same as any other in the previous 11 months. My mother was working as a dietician at the Second City Hospital, and living not too far away. As she was walking to work, she was surprised to see a large number of trucks transporting people somewhere. And the people being transported were waving to her. She didn't know what to make of this.

While at work, she received a phone call from her foster sister, informing her that her foster brother, Jānis Raiska, had been arrested together with his wife, Elga, and sent to Siberia. Fortunately, their two children were spending the summer in the country, and so were not arrested.

As my mother had been a member of the nationalist *Aizsardzes* organisation, and my father was a member of a student fraternity, she was convinced that they would be included in the next round of arrests.

What does a Latvian woman with an almost 2 month old child do under these circumstances? What **you** do?

Simple. She prepares for the journey, by packing a suitcase. Of course, we all now know that my sister would not have survived the trip, just as many infants did not survive the journey that began on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June. And I would not be here today to tell you about it. Fortunately, the German army came and forestalled any further Soviet deportations until the return of the Red army towards the end of the war.

But she also did something else. She went out and bought a bar of soap. And this is it. (*See photo*). This is the bar of soap that my mother bought in preparation for being sent to a slave labour camp or extermination camp in Siberia. The best quality blue soap for washing clothes. I can just make out the manufacturer's name: *A. Brieger, Riga*.

My mother's foster brother died in Siberia soon after arriving there, but his children survived. And my mother survived, bringing this bar of *Siberian* soap all the way to Australia. It is a reminder that fate is convoluted and unpredictable.

It is also an example of the attitude of resignation that the Baltic people have shown too often, only rarely interspersed with short periods of decisive action in aid of the survival of our peoples and of our countries.

Another example is my wife's grandfather, Pēteris Ūdris. As a well loved police chief of a small town, he was warned in advance to make himself scarce for a few days in June. However, he replied that he had nothing to fear, as he had done no wrong. At least he sent his family to safety away from

the town, but he himself was arrested and sent to Siberia, where he died in the Vyatka slave labour camp less than a year later. And my wife's mother and uncle grew up without their father.

These stories may be repeated with actual names not tenfold, not a hundred-fold, not a thousand-fold, but at least tenthousand-fold times. Each of these names accuses the perpetrators of this evil. And each name equally accuses all who condoned this evil, and who still today deny that this was evil.

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Let us not forget that this happened in a time of peace for the Soviet Union – before the start of the so-called *Great Patriotic War* – the Russian term for that part of the Second World War that started with the German attack on the Soviet forces in Soviet occupied Poland and Soviet occupied Finland, and ending one day after *Victory in Europe Day*. The three Baltic countries were formally allies of the Soviet Union, allowing the establishment of sizeable Soviet military bases in their territories in 1939. The bases in Estonia were even used for the bombing of Helsinki in the *Winter War* of 1939/1940.

The three Baltic countries had differing responses to the Soviet demand to be allowed military bases, but all three acquiesced, thus sealing their fate, as this made their territories almost indefensible.

This quiet acquiescence is all the more surprising and worrying, as all three governments would have known of the events of the previous few years in the Soviet Union. Here I shall make the first departure from my statement about statistics, because this is one that is not so well known. Of the approximately 150,000 Latvians living in the Soviet Union, almost half disappeared as the result of the so called *Latvian Operation* of 1937/1938. This was genocide, pure and simple. Imagine the Olympic Stadium (or ANZ Stadium) with its capacity of 83,500, the Sydney Football Stadium (or Aussie Stadium) with its capacity of 45,500, and the Paramatta Stadium with its capacity of 20,000. Imagine them all three filled to capacity – that was more or less the total number of Latvians living in the Soviet Union in 1937. Now image all the people in the Sydney Football Stadium killed and all the people in the Paramatta Stadium killed, and for good measure, a couple of thousand people in the Olympic Stadium as well. That is what happened in 1937/1938.

And knowing this, the three Baltic countries demonstrated their usual attitude of resignation by agreeing to the stationing of Soviet troops in their territory in 1939. And continued this resignation by surrendering their countries in 1940.

The events of June 14, 1941 are just a logical continuation of the foregoing.

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Baltic statehood lay dormant for 50 years, but armed resistance continued for a very long time in the occupied territories. This is not the time for a detailed discussion of the resistance movement, but I can mention that large parts of it were sabotaged by the British double agent Kim Philby, who passed information on the Baltic resistance to his Soviet contacts. A lot of people died because of his actions.

In the West, actions were mostly in terms of words. But on the odd occasion, some form of direct action was implemented, but in a comparatively mild way. We can guess that the date of the following news item is significant. I will read from page 3 of the Sydney Morning Herald of Tuesday, 13<sup>th</sup> June, 1950 – 61 years ago tomorrow. It is a small article at the bottom of the page:

"Communist H.Q. Windows Are Smashed

Police arrested three Latvian migrants after two plate glass windows had been kicked in at the Australian Communist Party Headquarters, William Street, King's Cross, early this morning.

Sergeant J. Browne, and Constables S. McInernie, D. Leach. and A. Mason, were patrolling the area when they heard the sound of breaking glass. The men were taken to Darlinghurst Police Station and charged with causing malicious damage to property. Police said that it was the second time within a few days that windows in the building had been smashed."

The perpetrators are not named in the newspaper article. If any of them are present today, or if anybody can disclose who they were, I would be interested in hearing from them. This incident also raises some questions – how could they be so unlucky, as to be caught in the act, why was there such a large patrol (4 policemen), and who smashed the window a few days earlier?

In any case, this is more an example of impotent lashing out, than of any serious rage.

The Latvian resignation continued during the even larger deportations of 1949. Again, during a time of peace, allegedly.

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History is full of such things. Wars are not unusual, and genocide, or attempts at genocide are not unusual. One country, or one nation feels entitled to liquidate another nation. This can come as the culmination of a long build-up, with the ground being prepared by manipulation of public opinion. Or it can be a sudden turn-around, where once friendly neighbours suddenly turn on each other, usually inspired by outside forces. And once it starts, it is very difficult to stop.

Genocide is a crime against humanity. Murder is a crime. How do we weigh the relative moral culpability? And who do we believe when a prevalent version of history is called into question?

Let us be clear in one thing. The Soviet Union perpetrated a crime of enormous magnitude against the people of the Baltic republics. Do we call it genocide, do we call it mass murder? Rephrasing Shakespeare: "Genocide by any other name is just as evil".

Recently, a letter purporting to be the original of Hitler's anti-Semitic diatribes of 1919 has surfaced. Apparently, he was already preparing the ground for the later attempt at annihilating the Jewish race.

At about the same time, the seeds of the annihilation of the Latvian race were being sown in Russia.

A certain V. Kadashov wrote in the newspaper *Vorozhdenye* on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September, 1918: "You know, Latvians aren't people – they are stupid, rabid monkeys; loathsome, bloodthirsty two-legged beasts".

The official newspaper of the White Russian army (that is, the tsarist army fighting against the communists), *Narodnaya Gazeta* (or *The People's Newspaper*) wrote in its issue of 24 May, 1919:

"Anyone who has lived amongst Latvians knows, that, on the one hand, they are a very industrious people, but on the other hand, dim-witted, stubborn and completely without feelings. There are not, and never have been amongst Latvians any people of stature, which is why these people are a grey mass. Even educated Latvians are just as low in their souls and their spiritual development as any Bashkirs and Kirgizes, to whom they are blood relations.

Latvians are such, and remain such, not only in their homeland Russia, but also overseas, where they have emigrated of their own free will, both individually and in small colonies. Everywhere and always Latvians are called blockheads. This nation has no poetry, no literature, no music. [..]

Chinese – they are Mongols, almost similar to Latvians in every respect. [..]

So we see that both these nations belong to the most evil in the world, and are closer to beasts than to humans."

These quotes appear in a very interesting book written and published in Riga in 1926 by Kristaps Bachmanis, who was the representative of Latvia in Kiev during the Russian Civil War. It is called

(in translation) *Latvians in the Ukraine during 1917-1919.*

During the First World War when Germany eventually occupied all of Latvia, about 800 000 Latvians left Latvian territory and became refugees in Russia, partly because of forced removal from their homes by the Russian army, partly of their own free will. Let us remember that at least half of the population of Kurzeme, the western province of Latvia, was displaced by force or free will. The statement of the Latvian National Council of March 1918 claimed that about 70% of the inhabitants of Latvia had left their homeland, that of the 800,000 inhabitants of the Kurzeme region only 210,000 were left in Kurzeme, and of the half a million inhabitants of the capital, Rīga, only 200,000 were left.

The First World War, the Russian Civil War and the Baltic Wars of Independence were demographic disasters for the Baltic people, but at least they led to our independence.

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It was during this time that Latvia, as a state, for the first and only time in its history, declared war on another country. This happened in 1919, and is usually a bit of a surprise, even to people who know quite a bit about our history. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of November, 1919, the German general Eberhardt gave an order with the authority of the government of Germany, taking over command of Bermond's so-called *Western Russian Army* (which mainly consisted of German soldiers), and which had a week earlier failed in its attempt to capture Rīga. The response of the Latvian government of Kārlis Ulmanis was to announce that a state of war exists between Latvia and Germany.

The German army was soon forced out of Latvia and Lithuania, but not before they had managed to burn down in revenge the palace of the Duke of Courland and many other buildings of great cultural significance in Jelgava (or Mitau) on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November, 1919. The important archives of the Dukes of Courland were destroyed. At the same time, the Germans left with three goods wagons filled with the archives of the Courland knights.

As another side-note, I can add that Russia was the first country that legally recognised Latvian independence. By the Latvian-Russian Peace Treaty, signed on the 11<sup>th</sup> of August, 1920, in Rīga, Russia recognised Latvia's independence and sovereignty, and renounced, for all time, any rights that Russia held over Latvia's people and territory.

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So here we have the situation approaching the fateful dates 70 years ago. Latvia had earlier officially been at war with Germany. Russia was the first country to legally recognise Latvia's independence. All three Baltic countries had quietly acquiesced to the establishment of large Russian (or Soviet) military bases in their territories. All three Baltic countries had, with virtually no opposition, further allowed the unlimited entry of Russian troops and the removal of the Baltic governments.

The president of Latvia was not only removed from office, but sent into exile in prison far from Latvia, where he died not too long afterwards. And the amount of respect shown by Russia to its treaties and to the Latvian state is such, that even to this day, we do not know for sure where the fourth president of Latvia is buried. He did not die and was not lost in the heat of battle. It did not happen in territory that was occupied or even attacked by German forces. He died in a far corner of the Soviet Union, which was fully and completely under the control of the Soviet Government.

This is the respect that the Soviet Union showed to the head of state of its ally.

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From the middle of June 1940 to the early 1990's the Baltic countries were occupied by two of the

greatest evils that the world has seen. And always each of the two sides trumpeted the story, that it was not them, nor even the other side, but others caught in the middle, who were the real villains and made into scapegoats. Even very recently we heard from Russia that blame for the Second World War should be placed on Poland.

For a detailed comparison of Stalin's and Hitler's empires, I sincerely recommend the film *The Soviet Story*. Using material from archives, it shows how Hitler learned from Stalin, and how they helped each other, including Stalin helping Hitler instigate the Holocaust. The DVD has subtitles in 30 languages.

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Now we seem to be faced with the duty of comparing crimes. The crimes against us are smaller than the crimes against someone else, so we don't count. So we should not talk about the crimes against us without mentioning the larger crimes against someone else. Or even better – we should not talk about the crimes against us at all.

When is a crime a crime? When is genocide genocide? Is there a demarcation line, a measure, that needs to be crossed before we are allowed to state our claims against those that have tried (and are still trying) to annihilate us?

The three Baltic countries joined the European Union on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, 2004. Apart from any economic benefits, this gave a wider platform for making our history and situation known. The Baltic countries each has elected members of the European parliament, and they can use their position in educating the rest of Europe in things, that some countries do not want to hear about.

Edvīns Šnore's film *The Soviet Story* was financed by the former European parliament political group UEN (or *Union for the Europe of the Nations*), and had its first screening at the European parliament.

But speeches by members from Latvia referring to these crimes often are received with the put-down that other people have suffered more.

Whenever I hear this, I am reminded of the British television series *Foyle's War*. The setting is the Second World War, and the series is about Detective Superintendent Christopher Foyle, who fights crime in the town of Hastings, on the South coast of England. While some episodes are related to the war, others are not. And the question that is asked in at least one episode is – with all the killing that is going on as part of the war, why investigate a single murder at all?

But investigated they are. And the criminals are punished.

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However, the punishment meted out for the crimes committed during the Second World War has been very lopsided. While thousands have been punished in Latvia by Soviet forces after the war for real or imagined crimes, the prosecution of war crimes committed by people supporting the Soviet Union has been almost non-existent. The crimes were certainly not prosecuted during the long Soviet occupation, and only in a handful of cases after Latvian independence.

The main organiser and leader of the 14<sup>th</sup> of June arrests and deportations in Latvia was the Commissar of State Security of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republics Semyon Shustin. He initially signed all of his orders using the Latvian surname *Silnieks*. No court ever touched him for his crimes against humanity, and he is thought to have died in 1978.

Alfons Noviks, born in Latvia in 1908, became People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of Soviet Latvia in 1940. As such he was the head of the State Security and of the NKVD (i.e. the earlier incarnation of the KGB), and the 1941 deportations came under his authority. He was the mastermind of the even larger deportations in 1949, for which he received a military decoration

which was usually only given for acts of bravery on the battlefield. He retired from the KGB in the 1950s and lived an ordinary life in Riga afterwards. Only after the Russian army had left Latvia was he tried and sentenced in Riga for genocide and crimes against humanity, dying of old age 3 months after sentencing. He was 88 years old.

A more recent case was the Soviet partisan Vassili Kononovs, who was tried and eventually convicted of war crimes in 2000. Kononovs was born in Latvia in 1923. He had led a detachment of the Soviet First Latvian Partisan Battalion in Eastern Latvia. In May of 1944, they had put on German uniforms and attacked the village of Mazie Bati, killing 9 villagers and burning buildings. Three of the villagers killed were women. One of the women, who was heavily pregnant, tried to run away, but she was caught, brought back to one of the burning buildings, and thrown in alive to join the others who were being burnt.

Kononovs received many awards, including the Order of Lenin.

Kononovs' trial went through many phases, with appeals on technicalities, and eventually ended up in the European Court of Human Rights. This court initially ruled in favour of Kononovs, but the final ruling in May of 2010 ruled in favour of Latvia, and agreed that Kononovs could be punished. Kononovs himself died in gaol on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, 2011.

I mention this case, not only because it is one of the very rare successful prosecutions of war crimes carried out by the Soviet occupation, but also because of the allies that each party gained.

It is not surprising that in May of 2009 Lithuania joined Latvia in participating in the case in the European Court of Human Rights. It is, perhaps, slightly more surprising at the official support that Kononovs received from Russia after being accused of this crime.

In April 2000, just before the judgement on his appeal with the Supreme Court of Latvia was to be announced, Kononovs was offered citizenship of the Russian Federation by the then president Vladimir Putin. Kononovs accepted the offer and gave up the Latvian citizenship that he held. The Russian president gave Kononovs the gift of a watch, and lauded his actions in helping free Europe from fascism. On Kononovs' 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2003, he received personal greetings from the Russian Ambassador in Latvia.

Russia acted as a third party in his hearings at the European Court of Human Rights and publicly urged the Court to prioritise Kononovs' case.

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Should these crimes still be remembered? Whenever they are mentioned by the Baltic people, there is a strong response from Russia, saying firstly, that there was no crime, and secondly, that we should not dwell on anything that happened in the past and should move on.

While *moving on* is, in the end, necessary for any type of future, these particular crimes are still alive today, and they continue to negatively affect the future of the Baltic people, especially Latvians. These crimes dramatically reduced the viability of the Latvian nation, and the large influx of Russians during the post-war occupation made Russian the *de facto* official language in Latvia. Only because of these crimes is the Latvian language facing the real prospect of disappearing within the next couple of generations, as the Russian mayor of Riga, Nils Ushakovs forecast in August, 2009.

As an interesting coincidence, according to official Latvian Communist party documents, on the day after the even larger deportations of the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, 1949, comrade Malahov, the secretary of the Riga Red Army district Latvian Communist Party Committee submitted his report on the political mood of the inhabitants as regards the deportations. He reported that the Chairwoman of Street Committee Number 11, one comrade Ushakova, had said to the Party committee Secretary of the city's orphanage, comrade Golubovska, that "there will soon be many free apartments".

As we know, the apartments did not remain free forever. And those who were lucky to return from Siberia, usually did not get to return to their apartments.

For some reason, Latvia received a much larger number of Russian speaking migrants in the post-war period than Estonia or Lithuania. I say *Russian speaking*, not *Russian*, because many of these migrants were not Russians, but were from nations that had already been thoroughly Russified.

So even if we were to *move on* from these crimes, we still have to live with their consequences.

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The German occupation from 1941-1945 was at least as devastating as the Soviet occupation of 1940/1941, but at least Germany admits to its crimes and the ring leaders were punished long ago. There were a lot of public hangings in Riga after the German surrender, and it is said that afterwards there was a rash of schoolchildren hanging themselves in imitation of what they had seen.

Unfortunately, the Baltic countries were caught between two evils, and the only hope was that somehow, miraculously, both would be defeated.

We HAVE *moved on* from the German crimes, and now count Germany amongst our friends, although we are still very apprehensive about the great friendship that has once again arisen between Germany and Russia. They are co-operating on many levels, for instance in building the 1224 kilometre long *Nord Stream* natural gas pipeline through the Baltic sea from Vyborg in Russia to Greifswald in Germany. As an aside, Vyborg is the former Finnish Hanseatic city of Viipuri, that Russia annexed as a result of the Winter War of 1939/1940. The aim of this pipeline is to bypass all existing pipelines between Russia and Germany, that is, to bypass the Baltic States and Poland.

We are also concerned at our NATO and European Union ally France selling Russia *Mistral* Amphibious Assault ships. Who would these be used against? The only credible answers are that they would be deployed against France's NATO allies along the Baltic Sea or against Georgia. Mistrals carry 450 to 700 troops together with scout or attack helicopters.

Apparently Germany has *moved on*, and France was often allied with Russia in any case (Napoleon notwithstanding), and was a rather cantankerous NATO ally during the Cold War.

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Has Russia itself *moved on*?

Although there was a glimpse of hope and a little bit of movement at the time of the fall of the Soviet Union, the simple answer now is that it has not. *Moving on* can only start with a full and frank admission of guilt, and that is certainly not forthcoming from the Russian side. One would have thought that nothing could be easier for Russia than to blame Stalin for all of the sins of the past, open its archives, and say something like, "well we did some really bad things, but it was all Stalin's fault". But not even this much is coming from Russia.

And it is also not coming from the second largest party in the Latvian parliament – the Russia oriented party *Saskaņas centrs* or *Harmony Centre*. They do not even admit that Latvia was occupied by the Soviet Union. In a survey of final year students in Russian language schools in Latvia in 2009, it was found that only 5% acknowledge that Latvia was occupied by the Soviet Union in 1944. And only 23% think that Russians should take the blame for the persecution and deportations.

The reason is simple. If there had been an occupation, then somebody did the occupying. And, possibly, somebody is STILL doing the occupying.

Not only do they deny any occupation, but they are extremely angry when reminded that the Baltic countries have different views on the matter. We only need remember the incident of the *Bronze*

*Soldier of Tallinn*, which was erected in the centre of Tallin by the Soviet occupying forces in 1947, and originally called *Monument to the Liberators of Tallinn*. Some Soviet soldiers had been buried there, or had their remains moved there. When Estonia decided to move the monument and rebury the remains of the dead in a more appropriate place in the Tallinn Military Cemetery in 2007, there were protest riots in Tallinn, besieging of the Estonian Embassy in Moscow for a week, and a series of cyberattacks on the Estonian parliament and ministries, banks and the media.

This lack of *moving on* is not only demonstrated by a lack of admission, and responses to statements or actions of the Baltic states, but it is most clearly shown on the Soviet so-called *Victory Day* on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May each year.

These are the annual celebrations of the victory over Germany. There is always a huge military parade in Moscow. In Latvia, the official date marking the end of the war in Europe is the 8<sup>th</sup> of May, as in most other countries, and is called *The Crushing of Nazism and Remembrance of the victims of the Second World War Day*. The following day, the 9<sup>th</sup> of May is celebrated in all of the European Union, including Latvia, as *Europe Day*.

But thousands of Russians still gather in the *Victory Park* in Riga on this day, as in the days of the Soviet Union. Almost all of the speeches and musical performances are in Russian. The flag of Russia is prominent. This is not a celebration of the crushing of Nazism, but is a celebration of Russia's victory.

As another aside, the *Victory Park* in Riga has a mammoth Soviet-era monument commemorate the Soviet victory, but the name of the park is actually dedicated to a different victory. It was created and named after the conclusion of the Latvian War of Independence in honour of the victory in 1919 over the German forces led by Bermondts. The Soviet monument was built in 1985 in honour of, and I quote: *Those who freed Latvia and Riga from the German Fascist Invaders*.

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Can we afford to *move on* in these circumstances?

I don't think so. Possibly, Lithuanians and Estonians are in a better position to move on, but Latvians definitely cannot afford it.

Nelson Mandela showed the way with the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. If only all sides would open-heartedly admit to the wrong-doings of the past, it would be much easier for everyone to *move on*.

My greatest fear is that the usual Latvian attitude of acquiescence, that I already mentioned, will take over, and there will be no one left to cry out "Why?"

WHY were our parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles sent away to a living hell? I repeat again – the Baltic countries were allies of the Soviet Union, and would certainly have whole-heartedly helped in any fight against Germany. WHY were so many Baltic children sent to Siberia, many dying on the way.

The Latvian film producer and director Dzintra Geka has poured all her efforts into documenting the plight of children, who were deported to Siberia in 1941 and 1949. When some of these children returned to Latvia after many years, the Soviet system ensured that they were not welcomed, and many of them were deported a second time.

The grown up children who have returned to Latvia are usually financially disadvantaged. They meet regularly with Dzintra, who has come to look on them as her own children, even though they are older than her.

Dzintra Geka is a courageous woman, and has proved this through the many expeditions to Siberia that she has organised and led. The aim of the expeditions is to find Latvian survivors of the Gulag

and to document their stories. This is most often done in Russian, as many of the now grown up Latvian children don't speak their native language any more. Dzintra has already produced a series of documentaries, and every year continues this job.

Last year Dzintra followed almost literally in the footsteps of the 1941 deportations. She had chosen precisely the 14<sup>th</sup> of June for her group to start their trip – by overnight train from Riga to Moscow, and then on to Siberia by other means. This year's trip departs Riga by plane on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June, and among the participants is a Latvian from Australia, whose uncle was a victim of the Usolyag in Solyikamska. The group will be visiting Solyikamska on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June and will place a memorial plaque in the city museum commemorating the Latvian fathers who were victims of the 1941 and 1949 deportations.

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A recurring theme in my talk today has been documentation. The printed word, the spoken word captured on film and published on videotape or video disk, material on the internet, and even the original bar of soap. This documentation is necessary so that the crimes are not forgotten, and even more importantly, that we have a better chance of ensuring that the crimes are not repeated.

There is a museum in Latvia dedicated to ensuring that history will retain evidence of crimes against Latvia. Crimes that were carried out both by the Soviet occupation forces, and the German occupation forces. It is the *Museum of the Occupation of Latvia 1940-1991*, which took over the Soviet-era building housing the *Museum of the Red Riflemen* in the centre of the old town of Rīga, right on the Town Hall Square.

The museum was founded in 1993 by, and is mostly financed by expatriate Latvians. The director of the museum is Gundega Michel, originally from Australia. Visiting heads of state, including kings and queens, ambassadors and other distinguished visitors are given guided tours of the museum, sometimes by the deputy director Prof. Valters Nollendorfs, who is a Latvian professor of Germanistic from the USA.

Last month, on the 23<sup>th</sup> of May, the museum had its millionth visitor – Vladimir Mihailov, a 25 year old Russian doctoral candidate in jurisprudence from Moscow. Interestingly, the next visitor – visitor number one million and one was Hellart Peter Pabo, an Estonian from Australia.

Negative documentation, or the hiding or destroying of documentation is also a political feature. The Russian state archives contain much material that would easily and overwhelmingly prove the facts of the crimes against the Baltic peoples. But access to these archives is sporadic and incomplete. And Bermond's forces knew the value of archives – they appropriated one set of archives, and destroyed those that they could not take with them.

It is always easier to deny that something happened if there is no documentation.

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Have these crimes been washed away? Not at all. Just as my mother's bar of *Siberian* soap has never been used, so these crimes will not be covered up. We have not even seen a symbolic washing of the hands, because this would admit that there had been a crime.

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Finally I want to ask you, why have we all come here today? Everybody will have their own reasons, and I will share my view, which is the same as I stated in a similar speech in Melbourne many years ago.

We are NOT here to cry about everybody doing their worst to us – "us poor, oppressed Balts".

We are NOT here to wave our fists in anger and to demand revenge.

We ARE here to remember, that terrible things can happen in this world, even in times of peace.

We ARE here to remind ourselves that we are united by our shared experience of being ruthlessly persecuted.

We ARE here to reassure each other, that we have survived, and that we intend to survive for a long time still.

I am here, to remind you that not much has changed in the world, and that we have to be continuously vigilant to ensure that THAT 14<sup>th</sup> of June is not repeated.

All the Baltic people here today have some personal contact with the tragedy of the 14<sup>th</sup> of June, and I have shared part of my contact with you. If we haven't suffered personally, then some close relatives have suffered. When you go home today, please, talk about this within your family. Documentation is necessary, but the most intimate communication of information is by word of mouth from a trusted source. Tell the younger family members what happened to you or your relatives, how they were taken away.

Then imagine how it would be, if tonight they came for YOU and took you far away from your homes and from Australia.

And then ask each other what you can do to ensure that nothing similar can ever happen in the Baltic States again.

Thank you for your attention.