

112TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. RES. 812

Commending the Albanian people on the 100th anniversary of the declaration of their independence from the Turkish Ottoman Empire on November 28, 1912, and commending Albanians in Albania and Kosova for protecting and saving the lives of all Jews who either lived in Albania or sought asylum there during the Holocaust.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NOVEMBER 15, 2012

Mr. ROHRBACHER (for himself and Mr. NADLER) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Commending the Albanian people on the 100th anniversary of the declaration of their independence from the Turkish Ottoman Empire on November 28, 1912, and commending Albanians in Albania and Kosova for protecting and saving the lives of all Jews who either lived in Albania or sought asylum there during the Holocaust.

Whereas in 1934, United States Ambassador to Albania, Herman Bernstein, wrote that, “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”;

Whereas in 1938, approximately 300 Albanian Jews lived in the Republic of Albania, and more than 1,900 escaped to Albania from Nazi-occupied Western Europe and the former Yugoslavia during World War II;

Whereas Albanians in Albania and Kosova, based on their unique history of religious tolerance, considered it a matter of national pride and tradition to help Jews during the Holocaust, and due to the actions of many individual Albanians, the entire native and refugee Jewish community in Albania during World War II survived the Holocaust;

Whereas Albanians sheltered and protected Jews in Albania and in Kosova, even at the risk of Albanian lives, beginning with the invasion and occupation of Albania by Mussolini's Italian fascists in 1939;

Whereas after Nazi Germany occupied Albania in 1943 and the Gestapo ordered Jewish refugees in the Albanian capital of Tirana to register, Albanian leaders refused to provide a list of Jews living in Albania, and Albanian clerks issued false identity papers to protect all Jews in the country;

Whereas in June 1990, Jewish American Congressman Tom Lantos and former Albanian American Congressman Joe DioGuardi were the first United States officials to enter Albania in 50 years and received from then Communist Party leader and Albanian President Ramiz Alia a thick file from the government's archives containing hundreds of news clippings and personal letters sent by Jews to their Albanian rescuers after World War II, but that the Communist government prevented from being delivered for 45 years;

Whereas Joe DioGuardi, upon returning to the United States in June 1990, sent the file to Elli Streit in Tel Aviv, Israel, for delivery to appropriate officials at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem for authentication;

Whereas Josef Jakoel and his eldest daughter, Felicita, Albanian Jews, led the emigration of nearly all Albanian Jews to Israel in 1991 as the Communist regime was collapsing;

Whereas Yad Vashem (the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Museum) has thus far designated 69 Albanians as "Righteous Persons" and Albania as one of the "Righteous among the Nations";

Whereas in February 1995, Congressmen Tom Lantos, Benjamin Gilman, and Jerrold Nadler and former Congressman Joe DioGuardi spoke at a ceremony at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, commemorating the addition of Albania to the museum's "Righteous among the Nations" installation;

Whereas based on the information authenticated by Yad Vashem, Jewish American author and philanthropist Harvey Sarnier published "Rescue in Albania" in 1997, to call international attention to the unique role of the Albanian people in saving Jews from the Nazi Holocaust;

Whereas in October 1997, the Albanian American Civic League and Foundation began the distribution of 10,000 copies of "Rescue in Albania" with forewords by Congressmen Lantos and Gilman to bring to the attention of the Jewish people and their leaders the plight of Albanians in Kosova living under a brutal occupation at the hands of Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic, in order to forestall another genocide in Kosova;

Whereas in a statement at the 2005 Albanian American Civic League and Foundation’s “Salute to Albanian Tolerance, Resistance, and Hope: Remembering Besa and the Holocaust”, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camps, Dr. Mordechai Paldiel, then Director for the Righteous at Yad Vashem, commemorated the heroism of Albanians as “the only ones among rescuers in other countries who not only went out of their way to save Jews, but vied and competed with each other for the privilege of being a rescuer, thanks to besa”, the code of honor that requires an Albanian to save the life of anyone seeking refuge, even if it means sacrificing one’s own life;

Whereas in 2006, Shirley Cloyes DioGuardi, Balkan Affairs Adviser to the Civic League and Executive Director of the Albanian American Foundation, published “Jewish Survival in Albania & the Ethics of ‘Besa’” in the journal of the American Jewish Congress to document the saving role of Albanians and how that role was revealed, in spite of the Communist effort to suppress it;

Whereas, on December 2, 2008, Arslan Rezniki was the first Kosovar Albanian recognized by Yad Vashem’s “Righteous among Nations Department”, for leading 400 Jewish families from Decan, Kosova, into safety in Albania, and his son, Mustafa Rezniki, who aided him as a teenager during World War II, accepted the award from Yad Vashem for him, posthumously;

Whereas Arif Alickaj, the Secretary of the Municipality of Decan, risked his job and his life helping the Reznikis rescue Jews in Nazi-occupied Kosova by issuing false identity papers to insure their safe passage to Albania and for whom (like so many other Albanians from

Kosova and Albania), Jewish survivors could not be found to validate his role, even posthumously, because of the Communist cover-up for 45 years of the archives documenting the many stories of Albanian heroism;

Whereas Shirley Cloyes DioGuardi addressed the 2010 International Oral History Association Conference in Prague, Czech Republic, and brought Leka Rezniki, the grandson of Mustafa Rezniki (who died in May 2008), to join her in revealing the “underground railroad” between Albanians in Kosova and Albania that was essential to the rescue of Jews; and

Whereas Albania is the only country in Europe that had more Jews in it after World War II than before it: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2 (1) commends the people of Albania and
3 Kosova for protecting and saving the lives of all
4 Jews who either lived in Albania or sought asylum
5 there during the Holocaust;

6 (2) commends Yad Vashem in Israel for recog-
7 nizing Albanians who took action at great risk to
8 themselves to protect Jews during the Holocaust, for
9 their humanity, courage, and heroism;

10 (3) reaffirms on the 100th anniversary of Alba-
11 nia’s declaration of independence in 1912, its sup-
12 port for close ties between the United States and Al-
13 bania and between the United States and Kosova,
14 which declared its independence in 2008; and

1 (4) commends the officers, board of directors,
2 and members of the Albanian American Civic
3 League and Albanian American Foundation for their
4 unstinting work, since 1989, to bring the plight of
5 the Albanian people and the unique historic connec-
6 tion between Albanians and Jews to international at-
7 tention.

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