

CLAUDE LANZMANN'S SPEECH
DELIVERED DURING
SHOAH VICTIMS' COMMEMORATION CEREMONY
ON JANUARY, 26 2012
AT NEVE SHALOM SYNAGOGUE IN ISTANBUL

Dear Friends,

It would be such a pleasure to be among you this evening "in flesh and bones" and not via a video tape recorded at my home in Paris. It would not only be a great joy for me, but a huge honor too. Unfortunately, a bad bronchitis kept me in France and the doctors forbid me to undertake this journey.

My regret is even greater, as today is not a day like any other and the movie that will be shown in a little while, on Turkey's largest public channel TRT, is a historical event which will have huge consequences, for which we will soon be taking some measurement.

For the first time since its release in France and around the world in 1985, my movie *Shoah* will be officially released for the very first time in a Muslim country, with Turkish subtitles which will enable it to reach a very large number of viewers.

I hereby, congratulate the decision makers of the TRT. And I would also like to acknowledge the hard work of the Aladdin Project in order to ensure a wider presentation of *Shoah* in Turkish, Persian and Arabic. I was very impressed by the infinite care on subtitling, and the beauty of the characters in a language unknown to me, as they appeared on the screen. This first projection, as I said, in a Muslim country, is an opening and a pioneering movement for other Muslim nations to follow; this seems so obvious and right.

I fully support the efforts of the Aladdin Project to bring Jews and Muslims closer through mutual understanding. Various initiatives have been implemented, including the translation of major works on the Holocaust in Arabic and Persian, the provision of reliable information on these two religions over a multilingual website, the publication of a collection of books on the history of Jews in the Islamic world, and the training of young rabbis, priests and imams on the Other's religion.

Last year, the Aladdin Project organized a trip to Auschwitz in the presence of an international delegation – including prominent politicians, academics and intellectuals from 40 different countries – in order to formulate a universal call to Peace. Representatives of Turkey's President and Prime Minister, many intellectuals and members of civil society took part in the Turkish delegation. Right after this trip, the collaboration between the Aladdin Project and Turkey was strengthened. Also, of screenings of the movie *Turkish Passport* based on a true story about Turkish Muslims who saved Jewish people's lives during WW II will soon be organized.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to some Turkish intellectuals who support the Aladdin Project, including Professor Ilber Ortayli, Chairman of the Topkapi Palace Museum, Mr. Enver Yucel, President of Bahcesehir University, Professor Nilufer Gole, Professor Cengiz Aktar, Mr. Cemal Usak, Vice President of the Union of journalists, but also to members of the Jewish community in Turkey and their president, Mr. Sami Herman.

Today we commemorate the anniversary of the arrival of the Red Army in Auschwitz concentration camp. Exactly 67 years ago, the first Soviet soldiers discovered in disbelief and terror, a few thousand sick and dying people who miraculously had survived to this date. The Auschwitz death factory exterminated one and a half million Jews and lots of gypsies who interned there, in an area of the camp reserved solely to them (we have no reliable figures).

I did not make *Shoah* to give some answers to Holocaust deniers or those who say that the Holocaust is an invention of Jews and Zionists and prove them wrong. *Shoah* is beyond the field of evidence; the reality of the Nazi extermination of six million Jewish men, women and children, need not be "proved", it's obvious to anyone who visits a Jewish cemetery in Paris. It is not uncommon to see a picture affixed to a tombstone, with the caption: "Dead. Murdered (or killed) in Auschwitz (or Treblinka) in 1942 (or 1943). "Sometimes the date is more complete, but it still hides the same shocking truth: the graves are totally empty of any body or bone.

The ashes of the exterminated Jews long since dispersed in rivers or lakes in Poland are reduced to this simple tombstone photo, as if the living could not accept the brutal fact of the disappearance. The only evidence is there, irrefutable and being inconsolably transmitted until the end of time.

When *Shoah* was broadcast for the first time in 1987 on the first channel of the French television, French Holocaust deniers did everything to dissuade viewers from watching the movie, publishing leaflets that read: "Open your eyes, break your TV." They had understood that my movie, in which not a single corpse appears, was the greatest danger for them, and for their absolute refutation thesis. There is not a single body in *Shoah*, but it is true, it is the ultimate truth of the extermination itself; that's the sign of its success. The only known archival footage showing a bulldozer pushing bodies have nothing to do with the extermination camps, they were filmed in Germany at the time of the opening of concentration camps, the dead were victims of a typhus epidemic. Three hours after the arrival of a "convoy" of three, four, five thousand people in an extermination camp – Treblinka, Sobibor, Chelmno, Belzec or Auschwitz – death had already done its work: all were asphyxiated by gas, and their bodies burned in ovens or on pyres in the open air. The large bones, which had resisted the fire, were reduced to dust by means of pestles of wood or stone. The ashes were bagged and thrown in the wind. Nothing remained, not a trace, the extermination was radical: humans were killed, and the destruction itself was destroyed. It was the perfect crime, denied the very moment it was accomplished.

A long way has been made since 1945 regarding European and global awareness. In 2005 alone, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution for January 27th to be recognized by nations as the "International Day of Commemoration in memory of Holocaust victims."

Many people did not understand the importance of memory work in countries that had not been involved in the Shoah, and did not recognize the universal lessons of the Holocaust. Auschwitz has gradually become the symbol of absolute evil. Humanity is unique and if I can cry in front of a Japanese movie of Yasujiro Ozu or before a masterpiece of the famous Turkish director Yilmaz Guney, even though it is not at all related to my culture, I can't see why Turkish people would not cry in front of *Shoah* as if it were their own history. Because it touches on what is human in us. There is only one humanity.

Tonight, we will all together remember the darkest pages of European history and we will draw lessons out of them. We will remember the need to fight for human dignity and against intolerance, against discrimination and all forms of racism. We will remember the importance of democracy and reliable institutions which protects a country against individual and collective passions.

It is no coincidence to me that Turkey is the first Muslim country to broadcast my movie on public television. Thanks to its democratic constitution and its moderate Islam, Turkey has now become a model for Arab countries and new governments that came into power after the recent revolutions. I hope that these countries will follow the good example of Turkey and will be committed to teach their people the universal lessons of the Shoah.

I would also like to remind that Turkey was for centuries a haven for Jewish communities. Many were Jews who found refuge here after fleeing the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition and Germanic states' pogroms. The Turkish Jewish community today is one of the most prominent communities in the Middle East.

When I finished shooting *Shoah*, after twelve years of work, I thought the movie would be seen by small elite of 3,000 people, and I was fully satisfied with that. Hundreds of millions of people around the world, in Japan or in China, have now seen my film and I am very moved that it be presented tonight to the Turkish public.