

Testimony from Lhoppon Rinpoche
June 7th, 2020
HB 20-1336 Holocaust and Genocide Bill
Good Afternoon, Members of the Committee,

Thank you very much for giving me this precious opportunity, I am here today to testify in support of this bill.

My name is Gyurmed Dorjee, sometimes I am known by my religious title, “Lhoppon Rinpoche.” I am a Tibetan Buddhist Teacher, a resident of Westminster, Colorado, Citizen of the United States, and a Tibetan refugee whose family was slaughtered. They completely destroyed my family name “Dehor Tsang” in Tibet due to genocide.

Over many decades the Chinese communists carried out the genocide of my people in Tibet. Although it is not as well documented as the Holocaust (and not many genocides are), many families & tribes suffered, they know the real history, it is written in their hearts. In my own family, I respectfully share a brief story of my ancestors that I have heard from my late father “Dehor Phuntsok.”

*My Great Grand Uncle “Dehor Pon” who was the ruler of our tribe was dismembered in public. They killed him by pulling apart two arms and two legs with four horses in public.

*My Great Grandmother “Gyal-khar Tsho-dhi” led and fought in a defensive uprising to protect our people, land, and culture.

*My Grandfather starved to death in prison and my grandmother and Aunt were punished with what was called the “black hat,” they were publicly scorned and made examples of. They could not look at anyone and had to always look down, they died in public from starvation.

*In the mid-1950s, my father joined the “Tibetan Defenders of the Faith” the volunteer group of Tibetan Guerrilla Fighters, and fought for several years.

*In 1959, HH the Dalai Lama was arrested in Lhasa. At that time my father and close to one million people from all over Tibet were forced to flee the country.

*HH the 14th Dalai Lama was rescued by the Chushi Gangdruk Tibetan guerilla fighters with the help and support of the American CIA. Only 110,000 out of almost one million who attempted to escape survived to join the Dalai Lama in India where they took refuge and slowly began restoring their culture

* The International Commission of jurists estimate nearly 1.2 million Tibetans out of a population of 6 million were killed through armed conflict and famine. The Buddhist religion was labeled a “disease to be eradicated.”

*Even now since 2009, 156 Tibetans have self-immolated in Tibet in protest of China’s cultural genocide.

I am a descendant of this family. At five years old, by my own choice and with my family's blessing, I entered the monastery for 25 years. I studied with many great masters, including the Dalai Lama, who left Tibet carrying sacred texts in their arms, not for fear of their lives, but with the hope and aspiration of preserving our culture and religion.

They taught us the Buddhist message of love and compassion, teaching myself and many young students not to hate anyone, but instead to practice equanimity and love for all sentient beings while holding our history close. This is my life's work and my life's mission.

In 2001 after completing my studies in the monastery, I came to the USA. In 2004 I founded A non-profit Buddhist Organization called Mipham Shedra. Our mission is:

"Mipham Shedra promotes the preservation and practice of Tibetan Buddhism for the benefit of all sentient beings"

In 2017 when I became a Citizen and read the American constitution in preparation for my test, I was deeply moved at how beautiful it was. There were many times tears came to my eyes as I learned more about how this great country was governed. However, we still have work to do. I have recently faced resistance and fear of different cultures and religions in my own community.

The story of my people and all stories of persecution must be taught in our schools. Children must know the history of everyone making up this great country so they can not repeat the past and learn to welcome the variety of peoples on this earth.

Based on my family's history with genocide and on behalf of the Interfaith Alliance of Colorado I believe passing this bill will benefit the future generations in Colorado. It will help them to be more accepting of all cultures and let all diversity flourish, including my Tibetan culture.

My father always said:

"True history
can not be carried away by rivers,
can not be buried by dirt,
can not be burned by fire,
can not be blown away by winds,
and can not disappeared in space,
it will remain forever."

Thank you for your time today and I welcome any questions.

Coalition Against Global Genocide

Testimony for the Holocaust/Genocide Education in Public Schools Bill

March 12, 2020

House Education Committee

My name is Roz Duman and I am the Founder and Executive Director of the Coalition Against Global Genocide(CoAGG) whose mission is to educate, motivate and empower individuals and communities to oppose Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity.

Why did I feel the need to create the Coalition in 2006? Because of growing up with many Holocaust survivors and realizing that the thread going through all their stories was that the world remained silent.

Years after the Holocaust, world leaders proclaimed that such atrocities would never happen again-- but Never Again became Yet Again as we watched genocides unfold in so many countries. The Coalition was created in response to the desperate need to make people less complacent, more aware and empower them to speak out and take action by providing information, tools and actions so that they could be a part of stopping present and future genocides.

Prior to founding the Coalition. I directed the Holocaust Awareness Institute at the University of Denver. During that time and even before then, I felt that Holocaust and Genocide education in public schools was not only essential, but critical. I was constantly told it would never happen in Colorado.

I believe strongly that it takes a village to raise a child and I believe it took a village to bring us to where we are today. We are thankful for all the many organizations, individuals and especially the prime

sponsors in the House and in the Senate for giving birth to the Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Public Schools Bill and the bill's many co-sponsors.

An inscription on the wall in the Hall of Remembrance at the United States Holocaust Museum, reads "Only guard yourself and guard your soul carefully, lest you forget the things your eyes saw. And lest these things depart your heart all the days of your life. And you shall make them known to your children and to your children's children".

Why is this bill so important? Because children are our future and they will continue to carry on the work of creating a better world. Because in recent surveys we have learned that so many of our young people as well as many adults do not know about the Holocaust and the many other genocides that have occurred in the past and continue today.

Simply said, our generation needs to do more to educate the young-- our future generation. Teaching our schoolchildren about the evils of the Holocaust and Genocides is an important tool that can and will further the goal of preventing future genocides and crimes against humanity and at the same time inspire moral courage and provide lessons in human rights and human conduct.

In closing--a quote from Nelson Mandela "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

It is for these reasons that The Coalition Against Global Genocide, its over 40 Coalition partners and all of our supporters strongly support this bill ,

Rabbi Jay Strear

President & CEO, JEWISHcolorado

Testimony in support of HB20-1336, The Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Public Schools Bill

Colorado Senate State Affairs Committee

June 8, 2020

Holocaust and genocide education go beyond the value of remembering history. Like all history, the Holocaust will recede ceaselessly into the past, so the means by which it was perpetrated must be constantly revealed to new generations.

My teacher and friend, Dr. Michael Berenbaum, the founder of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, teaches that the real power of Holocaust education is that it asks each of us to put ourselves in the shoes of the perpetrators. A decade-long campaign of Nazi propaganda turned the Jews into “the other” – into “less than,” into “vermin.” German society participated in the atrocities or stood idly by while they took place.

Through Holocaust and genocide education, students must ask themselves, “How will I respond to such propaganda? Who in my life do I see as the other, and how do I treat them?”

Holocaust education requires firefighters to ask themselves, “Would I have allowed the synagogues to burn on Kristallnacht?” It demands that police ask themselves whether they would enforce unjust and discriminatory laws. Holocaust education demands government officials consider whether the laws they enact demean or raise up the dignity of all human beings. When an arsonist targeted a synagogue in Pueblo in March, law enforcement and firefighters responded immediately, and for that we are grateful.

With bigotry and antisemitism on the rise – Jews have been disgustingly accused of manufacturing COVID-19 to manipulate the stock market – the words “Never Again” seem so hollow while this education becomes so critical.

JEWISHcolorado, on behalf of the state’s Jewish community, thanks HB20-1336’s co-prime sponsors, Representatives Dafna Michaelson Jenet and Emily Sirota and Senate Majority Leader Steve Fenberg and Senator Dennis Hisey, for their leadership, and thanks all General Assembly members for their support of this bill.

In Hebrew, we say, “ונתחזק חזק חזק.” May you all be strengthened in your noble work, and may you all remain healthy in this uncertain time.

Hello Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Helen R. Starr, and I represent the Second Generation, this is Hilda Kass my sister; Hilda is part of the first immediate generation to be born in Bergen Belsen's displaced persons camp after the war. I am introducing my mom, Fanny Starr. Fanny is Colorado's oldest Holocaust Survivor, and continues to speak about her experiences on a regular basis.

As we progress with education on the Holocaust, we must remember, Holocaust history is under siege. Many foreign governments are rewriting historical facts; the Nazis, Poland, and Russia used the same type of propaganda during World War II.

In 2018, Poland passed a controversial law that denies Poland was involved in the Holocaust. On Polish soil, Poland built six of the notorious death camps, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Majdanek, Chelmno, Sobibór, and Belzec. Poland also helped the Nazis build a total of eight Ghettos, how's that for denial.

Holocaust organizations throughout the world are being tested, the organizations are retelling the survivor's stories through their own facts. Sadly, Yad Vashem is accused of being a revisionist to appease Poland, Russia, and most recently Lithuania. The reasoning, the survivors are passing, and as they pass, so does the truth.

Many historians are criticizing governments that are run by Nationalist; Nazi Germany was a Nationalist government. Nick Robins-Early (2020) recently wrote an article.

The far-right political parties are increasingly attempting to twist history to fit into their own narratives. And they're going after cultural and educational institutions to do so. When the past doesn't fit these governments' political purposes, it has no place being remembered."

We took a risk; in 1967, my late husband Zesa, and I began reaching out to schools, churches, and synagogues sharing our truths and experiences, as Holocaust survivors were not teachers. We spoke as a team until my late husband passed away in 1998. We shared what we endured for six long years. We shared our firsthand testimonies as witnesses to torture, we slave labored, and bore witness to mass murders. I was liberated from Bergen-Belsen concentration camp on April 15, 1945, and Zesa from Dachau, on April 29, 1945.

The value of HB20-1336 cannot be overstated at this critical time in our history, and the only way to combat denial is through education. Now is the time for you, the legislators, to take the risk in honoring the 11.5 million, six

million of which were Jews. We honor the living that cannot share their pains because the past is too painful. We honor those who were silenced by the violent past. We can never forget.

Thank you for letting us share on this momentous day in history.

Oscar Sladek of Denver, Colorado

Testimony in support of HB20-1336, The Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Public Schools Bill

Colorado Senate State Affairs Committee

June 8, 2020

When I first came to Denver, I joined an organization of Holocaust survivors that counted more than 200 people amongst its members. All of us arrived ready to contribute to Denver's economy and society. We became business leaders, political leaders, and religious leaders, helping Colorado become the great place it is today.

Today that number is much smaller. Many are in their mid-90s and it is difficult for them to travel to and speak at events. I am no spring chicken, but I prioritize sharing my story with as many students as I can. I have been speaking to students about my experiences in the Holocaust for the last 45 years, including when I lived in Canada and in California. In Canada, there was a clear insistence on teaching about the Holocaust. But in America, it seems like history is a neglected subject in public schools and in many institutions of higher education.

I have worked closely with the Holocaust Awareness Institute at the University of Denver and the Mizel Museum to reach these audiences. I have addressed middle and high schools, as well as 1st- and 2nd-year college students. I have spoken to soldiers at U.S. military bases and at U.S. government agencies.

In most cases I have been disappointed by the lack of knowledge about what happened in Europe between 1939 and 1945. It feels like the education system is not interested or doesn't see the value of learning about this history or its consequences.

For example, when I explain that that the area where my family and I hid from the Nazis was liberated by Russian soldiers, some students are confused because they thought the Soviet Union was on the Nazis' side.

I am even more bothered that many educators and teachers have little to no knowledge or understanding about what happened in Europe during World War II and the persecution and murders of millions including Jews, members of the LGBT community, communists, and many others who were in the way of the Nazis' "pure" state.

Many schools teach about World War II and the 80 million people who died in the European and Pacific theaters. The magnitude of that number distracts from the fact that the Holocaust was one of the worst annihilations of people in history, and it took place over just six years. It is an historical event that cannot be forgotten.

Jews came here, to America, to rebuild their lives, to live in democracy, and to start families. When I first arrived in the United States, I took a deep breath and felt free. We went through an experience that was so difficult, it's hard to even conceive of it. But it's so important that people understand.

People can be turned against each other. I know this better than most. And it scares me that it could happen in a country and a state that I love.

I am nervous about the rise of anti-Semitism we are witnessing. We have gone through a number of crises but people enjoy this freedom and want to maintain it. Those who escaped their countries escaped persecution and death.

When speaking to groups, especially young people, I try to stress that human nature is very fragile, and humans are prone to embracing the messages in propaganda. The Nazi-created propaganda created deep anti-Semitic sentiments in Germany and other European countries – including the country I came from, Slovakia – and that permitted the Holocaust to occur.

We don't want it to happen again, and I hope that you will vote to support this important piece of legislation.

6/7/2020 10:03 HB20-1336

Mark

Bromley

"This bill is religious based in origin and crosses the line of separation of Church and state. I believe this course material is already educated under World History and US History graduation requirements and can only be religiously based if you are trying to create an entire class dedicated to this singular topic.

The atrocities of the Holocaust and Genocide are something all students should have knowledge of and I do believe Colorado Public Schools do teach this material in studies of WWII that cover a good amount of US History and World History.

Making this a mandatory focus course is religiously biased and this law has no place in our fine schools that already cover this subject effectively.

I understand the CARES act has money but creating reckless and irresponsible bills to spend that money is stupid.