

**Statement by the Honorable Warren L. Miller  
Chairman, United States Commission for  
the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad  
on Signing the Agreement  
between the United States of America  
and the Republic of Hungary  
on the Protection and Preservation of Certain Cultural Properties  
April 14, 2004 Budapest, Hungary**

Minister Hiller, Ambassador Walker, distinguished guests:

I am pleased to be in Budapest with you to sign this important agreement between our countries. I am also proud to tell you that my grandfather immigrated to the United States from Hungary as a young man. Therefore, I hope you will allow me the honor of calling myself a Hungarian American.

Let me also note the presence of one of my predecessors as Commission chairman, Arthur Schneier. Rabbi Schneier is a distinguished religious leader in the United States.

The United States appreciates the Government of Hungary's efforts and the particularly strong leadership of Minister Hiller and Ambassador Simonyi in concluding this matter.

The Agreement entered into today commits our governments to assist preservation efforts and prevent discrimination with respect to the cultural sites of religious and ethnic groups.

Historic sites, monuments, places of worship, cemeteries and mass graves, and related archival material are encompassed by the Agreement, and a Joint Cultural Heritage Commission is established to further these efforts.

In the Agreement, particular emphasis is placed on the cultural sites of groups that were victims of genocide during World War II. This is because a special situation exists regarding communal properties of the Jews. Approximately 565,000 of Hungary's 725,000 Jews were murdered in the Holocaust. Many others fled to the United States and elsewhere and did not return. Thus, in many places, there were few or no Jews left to take care of the cultural sites important to them such as cemeteries and synagogues.

Thousands of Roma were also murdered, and although there are fewer specific sites associated with Roma culture, the Roma memory must also be preserved.

It is appropriate and symbolic that we are signing the agreement in Budapest this week, in conjunction with the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Jewish ghettos in Hungary. The ghettos marked the beginning of the process of mass genocide in Hungary that created the need for today's agreement.

While some of the sites cherished by Hungary's Jews were destroyed by the Nazis and their collaborators, scores of Hungarian synagogues and almost one thousand Jewish cemeteries remained immediately after World War II. But, during the repressive occupation by the Soviet Union, most of these buildings and sites deteriorated and some were completely destroyed.

With the downfall of the Soviet Union and the rebirth of freedom in Hungary, however, the surviving Jewish community and government agencies, working together as partners, have made a determined effort to protect and preserve this historic legacy.

An outstanding example of this cooperation was the restoration of the magnificent Dohany Street Synagogue, a multi-million dollar project that was mostly funded by the government of Hungary. Another example is the restoration of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century synagogue in the town of Mad, a project funded by the Hungarian government and assisted by private American donors. The Jewish Community, under the leadership of Mr. Zoltai, continues to grow stronger and become more independent as it develops programs to reclaim properties and protect cultural heritage sites.

I am proud to note that Americans of Hungarian descent have also been working to protect the grave sites of their families, and to honor the memory of family members murdered in the Holocaust who have no known graves. Private groups and individuals, several of which are associated with Rabbi Zvi Kestenbaum, a member of the Commission that I chair, have been funding and coordinating the restoration of small cemeteries for years.

In addition to aiding the restoration of synagogues and being supportive of the Jewish community, the government of

Hungary and its political leaders must be recognized and commended for the recent enactment of a law banning statements and publications which incite hatred against any national, ethnic, racial, or religious group.

In a few hours, we will witness the opening of Hungary's new Holocaust Museum and Documentation Center, an important and historic step in the process of remembering the past and of conveying its lessons to future generations. As Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy said when the corner stone for this museum was laid in December 2002, "this is not a Jewish matter or a Roma matter, this is a Hungarian matter."

Opening the Holocaust Museum and Documentation Center is a beginning, not an end. The educational process, which this center will support, is a critical component in the battle against anti-Semitism and other forms of bigotry which continue to be a serious problem in Europe and elsewhere.

While significant progress has been made in Hungary in recent years to ensure an open society, the challenge of defeating the evil of anti-Semitism remains. The U.S.

Government fully supports the Government of Hungary's efforts to eliminate harmful stereotypes, prejudice and the distrust that arises from lack of knowledge of one another's culture.

The agreement we have signed today is one of a number of similar agreements that President Bush's Administration has negotiated with different countries. The Administration has placed a priority on obtaining these agreements because of the President's determination to fight anti-Semitism. This agreement is part of that effort – recognizing that anti-Semitism often manifests itself through discrimination against or attacks upon Jewish cultural sites.

By entering into this Agreement and by other positive actions, an unambiguous and unequivocal message has been delivered by the leaders of the government of Hungary to the people of Hungary – that anti-Semitism is wrong, it is immoral, and it will not be tolerated.

Ronald Reagan, one of my nation's great presidents, said:  
“Freedom is a fragile thing and is never more than one

generation away from extinction.” I would add that pluralism and tolerance are much the same – they must be fought for and defended every day.

On behalf of the government of the United States, and on behalf of those whose voices cannot be heard, we thank the Government of Hungary for truthfully remembering what happened during the Holocaust and for agreeing to protect the memory and the culture of those who perished.

Thank you.