

Taking History to the Street

Francesco Maria Talò (January 27, 2009)



The Consul General of Italy in New York opens i-italy's special issue dedicated to Remembrance day: "Italy does not forget. We still feel shame that this occurred in our country."

On January 27 the world remembers. On January 27, 1945 the world was forced to open its eyes and face the supreme horror of the liberated Auschwitz concentration camp. After 64 years we must not forget. Italy was among the first countries to dedicate January 27 to the duty of remembering the Holocaust. The day of remembrance then became a commemoration recognized by the European Union and as a result, the entire international community decided that every year on this date there should be a concerted effort to prevent the past from slipping away in our hearts and minds. The generation of victims and executioners is passing away and it is now even more important to stop and think, to remember and understand. We must continue to pay tribute and learn because ignorance often borders on distortion and bad faith. We then risk repeating the mistakes of the past and falling into the abyss of inhumanity of which man is capable.

New York is the most Italian city outside of Italy and it is the most Jewish city outside of Israel. With the U.N.'s headquarters located here, New York is also at the heart of the international community,



which makes these observations even more significant. For this reason, just a few months after my arrival last year, I decided, along with other Italian institutions, to do something special to commemorate this day. This year we will repeat the event. It is an experience that we want to share with the entire city. We hope to provide an opportunity for reflection in the city's frenetic daily life, as well as an opportunity for us to be more inclusive and the city to be more involved in our initiatives. In this way, we will read the names of the Italian victims of the Holocaust on the sidewalk in front of the Consulate General on Park Avenue on Tuesday, January 27. Beginning at 9:00 a.m. for about seven hours there will be a relay of personalities and anonymous Italian, American, and world citizens who will read the names of people who lived like us and whose existence was cut short by other men like us.

This should never happen again. The sounds of their names will be carried into the cold New York air. We want hurried and cold passersby, motorists, and the indifferent to ask themselves about these names that echo in the New York sky. Last year, hundreds joined our call including the President of the U.N.'s General Assembly, the Consul General of Israel, the Nuncio representing the Holy See to the U.N., Rabbi Arthur Schneier, school children from [Park East Synagogue](#) [2] and the [School of Italy](#) [3] (which is increasingly participating in our activities), the Permanent Representative of Italy to the U.N., leaders of Italian and Italian-American organizations, representatives from the Jewish community, members of the N.Y. Police Department, and journalists. One after the other they read the names of those who were perished because someone had decided that they were different.

Italy does not forget. Although we are proud not to forget, we still feel shame that this occurred in our country. Perhaps again this year we will be the only foreign or American institution to organize an event so singular that it takes place on a city street as a way to experience community in the vast city of New York.

The realization of our goal was made possible by the [Centro Primo Levi](#) [4], the organization for Jewish culture in New York that is dedicated to Primo Levi, the author who explained the brutal reality of the concentration camps to many of us. The existence of the Centro Primo Levi in this big city attests to the greatness of a group that is small in size but of enormous cultural importance: Italian Jews. The Consulate General and the Centro Primo Levi have not only organized the reading of the names on January 27, but are also presenting a series of events and other opportunities for reflection which will take place over a week beginning on January 26. Other Italian culture institutions are also participating and have provided a coordinated calendar of events: the [Italian Cultural Institute](#) [5], NYU's [Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò](#) [6], the [Italian Academy at Columbia University](#) [7], as well as CUNY's [John D. Calandra Institute](#) [8]. Together we offer the city an unparalleled variety of events to mark the day of remembrance. It is also important to have i-Italy join our mission, as it becomes a part of the system and shows that we can create a vibrant sense of italianità in New York that is completely different from the worst clichés.

On January 27 there will be the reading of the names of the Jews deported from Italy and the Italian territories in front of the Consulate General of Italy (690 Park Avenue, at 68th Street, 9am-4pm)

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