

Kristallnacht -- The Night of the Broken Glass -- Nov 9-10, 1938

This was the watershed event many believe foretold what was to become The Holocaust. On that night most Synagogues in Germany and Austria were set afire or desecrated. Jewish Hospitals, Old Peoples' Homes and Orphanages suffered the same fate. Even Jewish cemeteries were desecrated. Jewish businesses were broken into, looted and vandalized, as were some private homes. Jewish men were dragged into the streets, made to clean the gutters and then, thoroughly humiliated sent to Concentration Camps.

Can you imagine the effect -- the horror it inflicted in every Jew, many of whom thought that such an event could never happen? After all, Germany was one of the most culturally advanced nations in Europe. It, however, became crystal clear that there was no longer a future in Germany and Austria, that the Nazis meant what they said, Germany was to become "Juden Frei" -- Free of Jews.

So the rush was on, nearly every Jew wanted to get out. They were not stopped by the Nazis, all they needed was another country to accept them and leave any wealth behind. What was the reaction of most of the world? For the most part inaction or limited action, silence or words without much effect. Yes, they were silent, BYSTANDERS as we call them at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and not the UPSTANDERS we needed them to be, and you know the result.

And now to the present. Has anything changed significantly? Have we learned

from this horrendous failure of humanity? What have we done to avoid this tragedy from repeating? Judging by the many subsequent occurrences all over the world, and even right now, when fellow human beings, fearing for their lives, are mostly ignored, relegated to flimsy tented camps in countries foreign to them, I must conclude, not much has changed.

This is why we must take every possible opportunity, like this one, to remind ourselves of our responsibility to advocate for those of our fellow human beings in need. To be a beacon of hope to them, to fulfill our moral responsibility to speak out and act to make their lives better.