

112TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. RES. 601

Commending the people of Albania on the 100th anniversary of the declaration of their independence from the Turkish Ottoman Empire on November 28, 1912, and commending Albanians in Albania and Kosova for protecting and saving the lives of all Jews who either lived in Albania or sought asylum there during the Holocaust.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

NOVEMBER 27, 2012

Mr. SCHUMER submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the
Committee on Foreign Relations

RESOLUTION

Commending the people of Albania on the 100th anniversary of the declaration of their independence from the Turkish Ottoman Empire on November 28, 1912, and commending Albanians in Albania and Kosova for protecting and saving the lives of all Jews who either lived in Albania or sought asylum there during the Holocaust.

Whereas, in 1934, the United States Ambassador to Albania Herman Bernstein wrote that “there is no trace of any discrimination against Jews in Albania, because Albania happens to be one of the rare lands in Europe today where religious prejudice and hate do not exist, even though Albanians themselves are divided into three faiths”;

Whereas, in 1938, approximately 300 Albanian Jews lived in the Republic of Albania, and more than 1,900 escaped to Albania from Nazi-occupied Western Europe and the former Yugoslavia during World War II;

Whereas Albanians in Albania and Kosova, based on their unique history of religious tolerance, considered it a matter of national pride and tradition to help Jews during the Holocaust, and due to the actions of many individual Albanians, the entire native and refugee Jewish community in Albania during World War II survived the Holocaust;

Whereas Albanians sheltered and protected Jews in Albania and in Kosova, even at the risk of Albanian lives, beginning with the invasion and occupation of Albania by Italian fascists led by Benito Mussolini in 1939;

Whereas, after Nazi Germany occupied Albania in 1943 and the Gestapo ordered Jewish refugees in the Albanian capital of Tirana to register, Albanian leaders refused to provide a list of Jews living in Albania, and Albanian clerks issued false identity papers to protect all Jews in the country;

Whereas, in June 1990, Jewish-American Congressman Tom Lantos and former Albanian-American Congressman Joe DioGuardi were the first United States officials to enter Albania in 50 years and received from the Communist Party leader and Albanian President Ramiz Alia a thick file from the archives containing hundreds of news clippings and personal letters sent by Jews to their Albanian rescuers after World War II, but that the Communist government prevented from being delivered for 45 years;

Whereas Congressman Joe DioGuardi, upon returning to the United States in June 1990, sent the file for authentication to Elli Streit in Tel Aviv for delivery to appropriate officials at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, in Jerusalem;

Whereas Josef Jakoeel and his eldest daughter, Felicita, both Albanian Jews, led the emigration of almost all Albanian Jews to Israel in 1991 as the Communist regime was collapsing;

Whereas Yad Vashem has designated 69 Albanians as "Righteous Persons" and Albania as one of the "Righteous among the Nations";

Whereas, based on the information authenticated by Yad Vashem, Jewish-American author and philanthropist Harvey Sarnier published "Rescue in Albania" in 1997 to call international attention to the unique role of the Albanian people in saving Jews from the Holocaust;

Whereas, in October 1997, the Albanian American Civic League and the Albanian American Foundation began the distribution of 10,000 copies of "Rescue in Albania", with forewords by Congressmen Tom Lantos and Benjamin Gilman, to bring to the attention of the Jewish people and their leaders the plight of Albanians in Kosova living under a brutal occupation at the hands of Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic, in order to forestall another genocide in Kosova;

Whereas, in a statement at the "Salute to Albanian Tolerance, Resistance, and Hope: Remembering Besa and the Holocaust" held by the Albanian American Civic League and the Albanian American Foundation in 2005 on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the

Nazi death camps, Dr. Mordechai Paldiel, then Director for the Righteous at Yad Vashem, commemorated the heroism of Albanians as “the only ones among rescuers in other countries who not only went out of their way to save Jews, but vied and competed with each other for the privilege of being a rescuer, thanks to besa”, the code of honor that requires an Albanian to save the life of anyone seeking refuge, even if it means sacrificing one’s own life;

Whereas, in 2006, Shirley Cloyes DioGuardi, Balkan Affairs Adviser to the Albanian American Civic League and Executive Director of the Albanian American Foundation, published “Jewish Survival in Albania & the Ethics of ‘Besa’” in the journal of the American Jewish Congress to document the saving role of Albanians and how that role was revealed, in spite of the Communist effort to suppress it;

Whereas, on December 2, 2008, Arslan Rezniki and his son, Mustafa, were the first Kosovar Albanians recognized by Yad Vashem’s “Righteous among Nations Department”, for leading 400 Jewish families from Decan, Kosova, into safety in Albania;

Whereas Arif Alickaj, the Secretary of the Municipality of Decan, risked his job and his life helping the Reznikis rescue Jews in Nazi-occupied Kosova by issuing false identity papers to ensure their safe passage to Albania and who, like so many Albanians from Kosova and Albania, died before Jewish survivors could validate his role at Yad Vashem;

Whereas Shirley Cloyes DioGuardi addressed the 2010 International Oral History Association Conference in Prague, and brought Leka Rezniki, the grandson of Mustafa

Rezniki, to join her in revealing the “underground railroad” between Albanians in Kosova and Albania that was essential to the rescue of Jews; and

Whereas Albania is the only nation in Europe that had more Jewish residents after World War II than before World War II: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

2 (1) commends the people of Albania and
3 Kosova for protecting and saving the lives of Jews
4 who either lived in Albania or sought asylum there
5 during the Holocaust;

6 (2) commends Yad Vashem, the Holocaust
7 Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority, in
8 Israel for recognizing Albanians, who took action at
9 great risk to themselves to protect Jews during the
10 Holocaust, for their humanity, courage, and her-
11 oism;

12 (3) reaffirms, on the 100th anniversary of Alba-
13 nia’s declaration of independence in 1912, its sup-
14 port for close ties between the United States and Al-
15 bania and between the United States and Kosova,
16 which declared its independence in 2008; and

17 (4) commends the officers, boards of directors,
18 and members of the Albanian American Civic
19 League and the Albanian American Foundation for
20 their unstinting work, since 1989, to bring the plight

- 1 of the Albanian people and the unique historic con-
- 2 nection between Albanians and Jews to international
- 3 attention.

