



Valsts kanceleja

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**The Prime Minister's Address
at the Commemorative Event at the Salaspils Memorial
8 May 2015**

Honourable Chairman of the Salaspils District Council,
Excellences,
Students, ladies and gentlemen,

Today, in many parts of Latvia, much like in other European and world countries, people gather at the events commemorating the innocent victims of World War II.

If you open today's page in a calendar, it reads – "May 8 – day marking the capitulation of Nazi forces and a remembrance day of the victims of World War II".

It is right here, at the Salaspils camp, where according to inscription on the memorial gate – "the land moans". This is the place where we can hear symbolic heart beats of victims. In the 21st century, this still is a tragic reminder of the past crimes we should never forget, and we must not let those awful crimes of World War II repeat again.

However, these symbolic heartbeats also remind us that humanity is the measure of all things - a principle we have to live by.

World War II destroyed the nations and countries. The war in Europe ended 70 years ago, on May 8. Here in Latvia, and in a number of other European countries, the long-awaited victory brought neither freedom, nor peace. Unfortunately, a large part of Europe experienced long years of captivity.

Any expression of freedom was brutally suppressed in Latvia; people were persecuted for every word they said. We found freedom only in our thoughts. The people of Latvia were so brave and smart, and were able to restore the independence 25 years ago.

Here in Salaspils, we have a facility that was created in our country by criminal regimes and imposed on us by foreign powers, after destroying our country and killing our people.

In the Nazi occupied Latvia whose statehood was abolished by the Soviet Union in 1940, the Salaspils camp was established already in 1941. It was one of many repressive camps of the German National Socialist regime created to deprive people of their freedom, a place where they were physically and mentally humiliated. There was violence, forced labour and murdering.

During the Soviet occupation, incredible myths and falsehoods were created about the Salaspils camp. It is regrettable that there are attempts to build one's political career on the blood of victims and tears of children.

The Salaspils Memorial is one of the objects of commemoration in Latvia that undeservedly continues to exist in some people's minds as a proof of the Soviet occupying power and its ideology. It is our duty to tell the true story because it will help eliminate the fictional myths created during the Soviet period.

It is the duty of historians to compile the lessons of history. Therefore, we are pleased that a comprehensive, academic historical study about Salaspils is under way. The study that will be based on thoroughly identified historical sources and scientific, non-politicized analysis of facts.

Salaspils camp was the place of suffering. Several thousands of innocent people were killed in Salaspils. The victims of Salaspils belonged to different nationalities – there were Jews, Latvians, Russians, Poles, Byelorussian children – all of whom were kept in the camp, and there many more. Members of the different resistance movements, including Konstantīns Čakste, the member of the Latvian resistance movement, were also among the prisoners of Salaspils.

Miervaldis Birze - a physician and writer, was also imprisoned in the camp. There were also Latvian legionnaires who had been imprisoned for disciplinary offences, as well as others who resisted the German occupation regime.

There were also local collaborationists of the cruel occupation regime, including the criminal Arājs Team, who served mainly as guards.

All these facts suggest that we need an objective assessment of Salaspils events. It is our duty towards victims. It is an obligation towards future generations. Today's event here at the Salaspils Memorial is attests to our determination to do that.

The exposition should definitely be supplemented with broader, more comprehensive and more sophisticated information. It should be improved by adding an appropriate, objective information that would be construed as incitement to hatred.

Unfortunately, even today, there are many places in Europe and in the world where conflicts have erupted and many innocent people are dying. Atrocious crimes were committed during the last century, and some are committed also today. Here we can mention the tragic events in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Syria. We also see that those who triggered the aggression in eastern Ukraine have not understood and learnt anything from history.

Those victims deserve that we not only pray for their souls, the souls of those who were killed. We must praise and honour humanity and do our best to prevent a recurrence of the horrors of war every day and every hour. Now and in the future, we all have to stand bravely on guard to secure the fundamental values of Europe - human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Let's bow our heads today in honour of the victims of World War II! May they never be forgotten!