

Speech at the United Nations Headquarters, January 29, 2019

Holocaust Survivors, Excellences, colleagues, friends, guests – dear all

Ruth Maier's diary – one of her last entries Thursday - 29 October 1942 –

....” It's now four years since Vienna. And still there's the same pain. The same inner turmoil. It's being Jewish.

The continual beating of defenseless people disgusts me. It's like hitting into something soft. It's disgusting. Perhaps they'll fetch me too. Qui sait?”

It is an honor to be here today, at the opening of the exhibition “Lives Cut short. Indeed, Ruth Maier's life was short.

Ruth Maier was fetched, but before that she did have some creative years up north in Europe, in Norway.

Young Ruth Maier came to Norway, January 1939, to people who wished her well, but they were helpless to assist her in resisting the Nazi machinery of murder.

In 1939 the county of Lillestrøm counted about 7000 inhabitants – no building, except the church may be, was more than two stories high. What was it like for Ruth to arrive there, all the way from Vienna? The Strøm-family, who opened their hearts and rooms for her and really wished the best for Ruth, knew what to do to ensure her a safe future in Norway. She should practice housekeeping – not a good idea for Ruth Maier. So they did what **she** wanted, they helped her to find a school to continue her education. Ruth was talented. She painted beautiful watercolors and spoke foreign languages. She meant that knowing Latin is essential for any human being. But she followed the advice of the Strøm family after arrival in Norway, to learn something useful. She learned to type.

Alas. She typed her answers in the “Register form for Jews” where she declared herself to be Jewish”, she typed in Norwegian, probably very proud of her new skills.

Her diary changed language to, she wrote down her thoughts and reflections about her life in Norwegian. She even pondered to learn the second Norwegian language, nynorsk, the minority norm! As she wrote

Friday, 17. Februar 1939, Lillestrøm: **...”Here in Norway...there are two languages, and I would have to know them both. That's crazy, obviously.”**

Her personality was multi-faceted and complicated her diary's kaleidoscopic. Fictitious dialogues, texts in quotations, prose and poetry, maps and drawings, interpretations of dreams.

One could say: Norge chose Ruth Maier; she only wanted life, knowledge and love in a safe place. She came to us with her dairies and dreams— and when she left us, she let us see her worn small notebooks, her diary. She even complained that these small books were too expensive, but spent her pocket money on writing material rather than useful objects of the kind the Strøm family thought practical.

It took a young elegant woman from Vienna for us Norwegians to be given such an intimate and revealing description of the Holocaust.

Today, the “Archive of Ruth Maier 1933–42”, held and preserved by the The Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies, consisting of her diary, letters, watercolors, drawing, photograph albums, are included in the UNESCO's World Heritage. Ruth Maier's diary represents Norwegian history for the world; we have selected her diaries to represent Norwegian heritage, the nation and its history. Ruth's writings belong to a list of objects in the National archives comprising the first letter written in Norwegian in about 1207, the witch-trials protocols from 1635, the document describing the Norwegian flag and the minutes from the first board meeting in Statoil, the national oil company, in 1972.

This exhibition has been made possible by a close collaboration between the DOW in Vienna and the Holocaust Center in Oslo. Two experts from these two institutions talked together and this started the co-operative effort. Our great gratitude goes to senior historian and co-curator Winifried R. Garscha and to Ewa Mork, the head of the documentation department at the Holocaust Center and co-curator – for good scholarly work the last years.

We are also heavily indebted to Jan Erik Vold for his decisive endeavor - Vold found, preserved, edited and published the diary of Ruth Maier – today translated into several languages.

This evening we stand in the most comprehensive institution in the world. Thank you to The Holocaust and United Nations Outreach Programme. Together, with organizations like the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, our closest partner, we will make sure that history is preserved and freedom of speech is guaranteed.

There is a variety of facets that may be found in Maier's texts. She tells us so much in the short entries and the very private letters. She describes the persecution of Jews when she sees it. But mostly, she describes daily life, feelings and nature. People she met, liked or not, Norwegian language policy, friendship and confusions. And her describing of the often quite banal events gives us a story of the Holocaust in Norway. She was not aware of it, we are.

The gas chambers in Auschwitz are to-day the symbol of Holocaust. Holocaust is dehumanization, loss of identity, disillusion, to be torn away from your own culture, the destruction of families, despair.

Ruth Maier helps us to see those 6 million Jews killed. With her help we can lift them out of their anonymity

The exhibition in Norway has convinced us that her literary Nachlass, offers a rich trove for a new ph.d. coming up, and to other related literary and historic studies.

Tuesday 16.oct. 1934 Wien:

I'd like to be famous. I don't want to just drop off like a screw from a machine. I can't imagine living in the shadow of unfame, so to say. People vanish. I want to live!"

Seven years later

Wednesday 24. December 1941, Lillestrøm (she wrote in the diary *so-called Christmas*)

Outside they are committing murder, letting each other die, being killed. ...Those with soft hearts are going mad, pleading towards heavens and weeping...

My God, the things they've perpetrated against us! Everything, everything, they tramped every tiny belief until it became so cold and desolate within us. They haven't left us a single ideal. If you don't have a heaven you ought to believe that. It's because life is for living on earth.

Ladies and gentlemen. Life is for living on earth. Thank you!

