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Paths of Memory and Action: Preserving the Past, Protecting the Future

Speech by Michael O'Flaherty
Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

delivered at the event dedicated to the remembrance of the Holocaust and the prevention of
crimes against humanity

organised by *Regards d'enfants* in partnership with the Municipality of Rothau and the European
Centre of Deported Resistance Members
Rothau, 27 January 2026

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear organisers, teachers, children, young people,

We gather today in Rothau – a place that bears witness.

A place where the shadows of history are tangible, where human beings torn from their homes and families were forced along the path to Struthof – a place where cruelty sought to strip away dignity, where atrocities committed under the guise of science and forced labour stole life.

Many were intended to vanish in secret, their resistance erased from memory.

Yet they are not forgotten. Here, in Rothau, their memory is entrusted – among all of us – to children, to young people. They have created the Memory and Human Rights Garden, a living testament to the victims, a declaration that memory is alive.

Today, we remember the genocide of six million Jews and 500 000 Roma and Sinti, and all victims of Nazi persecution.

But Holocaust remembrance is not only a lesson of the past; it is a foundation for protecting human rights, for defending democracy, for safeguarding the rule of law today and for building the future of generations to come. It is the bedrock on which the institution I represent rests.

It is also a commitment to confront, with courage and hope, the challenges our societies continue to face today. Through reflection, initiative, creativity and teaching – standing firm against hatred, honouring the promise that such crimes will never be repeated, and preserving our shared humanity.

To the children and young people here today: memory endures only if you, and others like you, keep carrying it forward – not as a burden, but as a continued commitment to dignity, to justice, and to the refusal of hatred in all its forms. Your participation matters. Your voices matter.

We are inspired by your dedication as ambassadors – of memory and humanity.

By remembering here, we join in charting a different path forward, guided by memory and responsibility – toward a future where equal rights and dignity are respected for all.

Thank you.