



Predsednica Republike Slovenije

NATAŠA PIRC MUSAR

**Address by the President of the Republic of Slovenia
Nataša Pirc Musar
at the ceremony on the occasion of the Slovenia-Israel Friendship Day**

Metlika, 19 July 2023

Check against delivery.

*Dear Madam Mayor,
Dear Mister Ambassador,
Dear Residents of Metlika,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends.*

I thank the Israeli President, Isaac Herzog, for his kind words and support for this joint celebration of the Slovenia-Israel Friendship Day. I also look forward to our cooperation and I hope that President Herzog and I will visit Metlika together one day, as this town has symbolically connected our countries and people in friendship for almost eighty years.

As already emphasised by President Herzog, the friendship between Slovenia and Israel extends back to the dark time of the Second World War and our joint fight against Fascism and Nazism. In that period, the Slovenian people and Jews forged solid ties of friendship that have lasted until today and which truly mean a lot to us. We are grateful to Israel for the understanding and active support shown at the time of Slovenian independence and entry into international relations.

After more than thirty years of diplomatic relations between independent Slovenia and independent Israel, regular political dialogue takes place at all levels between the countries. I am particularly pleased that this friendship is being further enhanced by the lively business relations which were instigated well before our independence. I hope and wish that these relations strengthen even more, including within the framework of start-up entrepreneurship, in which Israel is a global force and can set an example to Slovenia. Our traditionally friendly relations are further enhanced by cooperation in the fields of education, culture and science, and this has also expanded to the most topical fields in recent years; fields in which I believe intergovernmental cooperation is crucial. These include technological innovations, cyber security and artificial intelligence.

I am certain that all of the above forms the foundation of our friendship and also serves as an encouraging prospect for additional strengthening of relations between our countries and people in the spirit of mutual understanding and constructive cooperation.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year's celebration of the Slovenia-Israel Friendship Day consists of another symbolic bond, the story and destiny of two young, creative and courageous poets who lost their lives in 1944, much too soon.

Both are still seen today as a symbol of resistance, but also as tragic victims of a relentless war in which no one was spared.

The first commemoration of the Slovenia-Israel Friendship Day two years ago was dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the birth of the young Jewish poet Hannah Szenes. This year's ceremony is taking place in the Year of the Partisan Poet Karel Destovnik Kajuh, in which we remember his life and works. As with Szenes, who holds a special place in the hearts of the Israeli people, Kajuh left a significant impact on the collective consciousness of the Slovenian nation. In the poem entitled "Naša pesem" (Our Poem), he wrote,

*"My poem is not only my poem,
It's a cry of us all!
My poem is not only my poem,
It's a fight of us all!"*

With their poems, Szenes and Kajuh gave a voice to millions of young people who have lost everything in the maelstrom of war, even their lives. Their poems are eternal because they are sincere, but also eerily timeless, although eighty years will have passed next year since their untimely deaths.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

In "Our Poem", Karel Destovnik Kajuh touchingly described how young people lost their youth in those difficult times. They experienced the downfall of the old world and hid numerous hopes.

After the end of the Second World War, it seems that we have survived the history and ignored its lessons. But before eighty years have passed since its end, its shadow has yet again been cast on European soil, where it is sowing death. The Middle East and other parts of the world are also being plagued by unrest. Hope and lives are being destroyed in vain everywhere. We are faced with demanding challenges which we will not be able to resolve on our own.

At this point and on this occasion, I, as the President of the Republic and as a mother, call on everyone and ask all of us to promise to do everything we can and more so that such verses do not become the declaration of the generation of our children and their children. So that young people never again look hopelessly into a decaying world.

I sincerely believe that everyone – especially those of us to whom you entrusted the leadership – is able to act differently. To be better. With more wisdom and compassion towards one another. With more respect and understanding towards what we have in common: the desire for human dignity.

To have hope and fulfil this promise through our actions. This is the responsibility of all of us, the leaders, and also of everyone who is a part of society.

International cooperation, mutual respect, understanding and patience lead to the fulfilment of this noble objective. The decision on how to address our mutual disagreements must be made by us exclusively. Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, this is the most important power we all possess. To be able to decide freely about how to act and subsequently contribute to a better world and brighter future. The future that will reflect the ending of Kajuh's "Our Poem",

*"And yet, it's a blessing to be young,
to be young and full of hopes!"*

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, Thank you for responding to the invitation of the Israeli Ambassador, the Mayor of the Municipality of Metlika and myself and attending tonight's celebration. On this occasion, I want to sincerely thank you, Dear Madam Mayor, and your colleagues who are so wholeheartedly committed to the preparation of this ceremony. Thank you to the citizens of Bela krajina who have preserved the memory of Hannah Szenes for several generations. You are the wind beneath the wings of friendship between our countries. I am also grateful to Israeli Ambassador Boker and his team for supporting the celebration and his mission, performed together with Slovenian Ambassador Andreja Purkart Martinez, of enhancing relations between Slovenia and Israel.

Dear Friends,

"There are stars whose radiance is visible on Earth though they have long been extinct. There are people whose brilliance continues to light the world even though they are no longer among the living. These lights are particularly bright when the night is dark. They light the way for humankind."

Such bright lights were national heroes Szenes and Kajuh. In hope and with a sincere wish that these words by Szenes serve as an inspiration to all of us when

lighting the way for each other to a better future, I wish you a pleasant continuation of the celebration and the rest of the evening.

Thank you.