



Predsednica Republike Slovenije

NATAŠA PIRC MUSAR

**Address by the President of the Republic of Slovenia Nataša Pirc Musar
on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the liberation of
the Italian fascist concentration camp Kampor on the Island of Rab
and the liberation of the Island of Rab**

Rab, 9 September 2023

Check against delivery.

*Dear President of the Republic of Croatia, Mr Zoran Milanović, and Dear Madam Sanja Musić Milanović,
Dear Mayor of the Municipality of Rab, Mr Nikola Grgurić,
Dear Presidents of Veterans' Organisations of Slovenia, Croatia and Italy, Mr Marijan Križman, Mr Franjo Habulin and Mr Gianfranco Pagliarulo,
Esteemed Representatives of Slovenian and Croatian Governmental Bodies,
Ministries and Services for Cultural Heritage, War Veterans and Military Heritage,
Dear Visitors and
Everyone gathered here.*

I feel particular honour and deep respect to be able to share my thoughts at the ceremony honouring the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Italian concentration camp Kampor and the liberation of the Island of Rab. This site of residence, suffering and the last resting place for many of the 15,000 freethinking people who were incarcerated here must be a permanent reminder of the unacceptability of the atrocities of war and fascist violence. Human life, the life of each and every individual with no exception, is and must always be respected and invaluable. This is a standard of civilisation and a value of our existence and coexistence which must never be lost. We must all – every individual, all politicians and society as a whole – strive towards these efforts. If we ever lose this noble thread of human connection, reason and coexistence, it will be the end of humankind, humanity and the world as we know it. Remember: history has taught us many times that such things must never again be permitted. However, the maturity of all of us is needed, as well as ongoing reminders of the horrible tendencies towards disrespecting fellow human beings which are still indecently displayed today by, I am certain, rare yet loud individuals and extreme political parties everywhere in the world, including Europe.

All internees – mostly Slovenians, Croatians and Jews – men, women and children, who have endured the tortures of hell or have found their eternal rest here, had their dreams, wishes, pride, love for home, family and their nation. With the objective of denationalisation policy and dehumanisation, the fascist ideology tried to destroy all this. Nevertheless, unbearable conditions, hunger, cold, heat and violence failed to break the spirit of these people who are humbly remembered today. They persisted together and stood against the terror due to their love for family, language, freedom and homeland. Irrespective of gender, language, faith or nationality, these people grew closer in the cruel circumstances and eventually, together with the local inhabitants, expelled the occupier. To this end, their struggle is a very significant indicator of the broader fight against evil and an indicator of unity and harmony among nations.

In those dark times, the allied nations fought hand in hand for our existence and the possibility of free decision-making about our destiny in our corner of the world. Unfortunately – 80 years later – we can see yet again that peace, coexistence, dignity, rule of law and human rights are not self-evident in Europe. It is ever more important that we maintain and enhance cooperation between nations at the international level, to exchange opinions in international forums and organisations and harmonise countries' different opinions while observing international law and the principles of peaceful settlement of disputes. If combined with poor social conditions, the tendency to glorify only one nation within a country as seen in the past and the subsequent superiority complex in relation to other countries can lead to a catastrophe for democratic order, peace and stability in the world.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is crucial for our future that we do not forget the suffering of our ancestors, and above all, the historical facts and testimonies about the past events and cruel acts of fascism and Nazism. We must all confront our past, whether glorious or inglorious. We cannot change it. We can celebrate great days and great people, but we must regret inglorious acts and crimes against humanity and condemn them every day so that they are never forgotten. Above all, we must learn from the past in order to build upon everything that was good and never again repeat the bad things that were done to one another. But we must also learn to forgive. In this way alone will it be possible to co-create the future together in harmony and prosperity. Denial of the past removes us from that. It is difficult, very difficult for me to accept that certain people actually want such denial. What is more, they want and cause great damage to their fellow human beings without shame.

Therefore, it is our duty to pass on positive values to young people. Future generations will be able to build a fair and development-oriented world only if they are aware of the past errors, dark sides and delusions of humankind. Time must not erase the shocking testimonies of survivors about humiliation, innocent victims in mass graves and the extent of the cruel behaviour of the invaders who failed to spare the weakest, even children and newborns. By remembering and nurturing the memory of everyone who built a better world, we will ensure that the cruelties witnessed during the Second World War will never be repeated.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased that Slovenia, together with Croatia, decided to renovate the Kampor memorial park and war cemetery. By doing so, both countries showed their sensitivity towards the painful and harmful events of our joint history. I firstly want to thank the Slovenian Ministry of Defence for providing the initiative for the renovation and its extensive engagement. I also thank the other Slovenian and Croatian competent bodies and the local community of Rab for the effective execution of the necessary procedures. Thank you to the representatives of the anti-fascist and national liberation associations of Slovenia, Croatia and Italy and everyone gathered here for keeping the memory of the victims of war violence and national liberation struggle alive and for spreading the values of patriotism, opposition to fascism and Nazism and respect for human rights.

I sincerely hope that the renovated memorial park and the entire complex become a place of peace, comfort and meeting of the survivors, relatives and internees' descendants. And above all, a meeting place of all well-wishing and freethinking people. Let it become a symbol of persistence, perseverance, tolerance, resilience of the spirit and love for fellow human beings. It is only right that we also hear the people who experienced all of the above. I was moved by the following testimonies in the book, *Užaljeno maščevanje* (Resentful Vengeance), which was published this year:

"It was constantly repeated at lunch: ten, twelve macaroni or a spoon of rice for every person, and then we waited for that deity. A small loaf of bread was deity on Rab, it was God. It was revered more than all our gods and saints. People would kill for a small loaf if anyone dared to steal it."

"Indescribable hunger was particularly suffered by children who rushed to the pot at the end and cleaned it with their hands, licked it and ate everything, so that it was completely clean. Once I saw how children collected waste in the latrine and pulled pumpkin rind from among human excrement and ate it. Awful."

“The first heralds of an epidemic of death were small children and old people. Babies who came to the camp with their mothers were the first to go, followed by those who were born there. How could they not – their mothers lost milk several days after their arrival. The majority of those who gave birth there did not nurse their children even once. Camp authorities failed to give them any food or clothes for their babies, so they tried to keep them alive with unpalatable water they got for lunch or supper.”

Poštovani, ne dopustimo da se to ikada zaboravi! Slava im!

Signore e signori, non permettiamo che vengano dimenticati! Gloria a loro!

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, let us not permit that this ever be forgotten. Glory to them.