
Irene, Holocaust survivor: "Hitler did not win. And today I have a dream..."

"I stand here to tell you today that Hitler did not win," said **Irene Shashar**, a Polish Jew born Ruth Lewkowicz on 12 December 1937, one of the Warsaw Ghetto survivors, at a solemn Holocaust Remembrance sitting at the European Parliament in Brussels. When her father was killed by the Nazis, she managed to escape from the ghetto with her mother through the sewers and ended up on the other side of Warsaw, where she remained a "hidden child" for the rest of the war. At the end of the war, she moved to Paris with her mother. When her mother died in 1948, she was adopted by relatives in Peru. She completed her studies in the United States, moved to Israel at the age of 25 and became the youngest person ever to hold a Hebrew University professorship. She currently lives in Modiin, Israel. In 2023 she published her biography 'I Won Against Hitler'. **"I was blessed..."**. Her moving story is one of hunger and fear. But it was also marked by her boundless love for her mother - she said - who put all her strength and resourcefulness into saving her life. She then moved on to talk about her life and family today, and the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas terrorists. "I have been blessed with the opportunity to have children and grandchildren," she said. "I have done exactly what Hitler tried so hard to prevent. Hitler did not win," she remarked. Speaking about the ongoing war and the 7 October terrorist attacks, she said she had left her country "in the grip of violence, murder, rape and terror" and asked MEPs for their solidarity and support to ensure the hostages were "reunited with their families." **Europe a model for the Middle East.** After 7 October, "the resurgence of anti-Semitism means that the hatred of the past is still with us," Ms Shashar warned. "Jews once again do not feel safe living in Europe. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, this is not acceptable." 'Never again' should truly mean never again." "I am now 86 years old," Irene Shashar said, moved but determined. "When I was a child, Europe was still a cluster of countries with strong feelings of resentment against one another. Europe was able to put aside old hatreds and forge a unity. I truly believe that the values that inspired European unity - respect for diversity, respect for religious freedom and a willingness to live together in peace - can play an important role for the future of the Middle East." **End anti-Semitism.** She continued: "I also have a dream. I dream that my children, all children, live in a peaceful Middle East, one that is free of hate, especially towards us, the Jews. In my dream, Jews find safety and security anywhere they choose to call home. And antisemitism is finally a thing of the past." Ending her speech (in which she made no reference to the situation in Gaza or the Palestinian people), Ms Shashar concluded that while she had won against Hitler, her grandchildren must now fight for their survival. "I call on you, the members of the European Parliament, to help make my dream come true." "Together with you, we can end antisemitism and achieve lasting peace." MEPs gave Ms Shashar a very long applause at the end of her speech and then observed a minute's silence. **Rebuilding from the ashes.** "It is an honour for us to have you here in the European Parliament [...] though, dear Irene, none of us can even begin to imagine the extent of the pain you have suffered," said President **Roberta Metsola**, addressing her distinguished guest speaker, Irene Shashar, at the European Parliament plenary session marking Holocaust Remembrance Day. Metsola then added: "On Holocaust Remembrance Day, we are reminded of the importance of sharing stories like yours, today and for generations to come. It is important to preserve our values" because "the history of Europe is a history of values and ideals". "It is about building bridges between people. It is about turning enemies into partners and friends. About rebuilding from the ashes." She continued: "Over the years, our Union has transformed the lives of millions of people. We have torn down barriers and replaced them with shared values. We have delivered freedom, prosperity and opportunity. We need to remember the history of Europe, to remember its horrors and to build on its achievements to overcome them. To understand where we have come from and to pass these lessons onto our children."

