

## On Raoul Wallenberg

»Raoul Wallenberg, descendant of a Swedish trading family, arrived in the Hungarian capital after the German occupation of Hungary, in July 1944, four months after the German troops had marched into the country, just at the time when Governor Miklós Horthy – ceding to significant international and Church pressure – had the deportation of the Jews stopped. The temporary improvement in the political climate was favourable for saving human lives in which the Swedish diplomat took part right away. As soon as in August, he issued 4500 protective passports, convincing the Hungarian authorities to accept them as “family documents”, thus every issued document could save the life of several persons. From the very beginning, he cooperated efficiently with the Red Cross, with the diplomats of neutral states and with his Hungarian helpers. Though the situation in Hungary took a dramatic turn after Horthy’s unsuccessful attempt to exit from the war, with the Arrow Cross Party’s coup, the rescuers – and among them the more and more important Raoul Wallenberg – did not give up: they continued to save the lives of the continuously menaced tens of thousands, often risking their own lives. While rescuing the lives of people from the Nazis, Wallenberg could not imagine that in just a couple of weeks he would become the victim of another oppressive regime. On 17 January 1945, the Soviet troops carried him away, and he would never return from the Soviet Union.

Raoul Wallenberg is a symbolic figure of rescuers in Hungary and in Europe in his time. A “Man amidst inhumanity” fighting the horrors of the Holocaust. Hungary values highly and treasures the memory of the martyr Swedish diplomat. To honour the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth, the Government of Hungary has decided to declare the year 2012 as Wallenberg Year and to set up a Commemorative Committee. Our purpose was to pay tribute to his human greatness, and also to commemorate all those who saved lives together with him or similarly to him, amidst the inhumanity of oppressive regimes. This anniversary offers a good opportunity to draw lessons from the past, to review, in their light, current human rights and minority issues, and to address the future and the young generations.

In the programmes of the Raoul Wallenberg Year Hungary shall present Raoul Wallenberg, the diplomat and man, and his partner rescuers, helpers in Hungary, the conditions of the rescue, the dangers of exclusion and discrimination. Doing so, we intend to draw attention to the importance of the protection of human rights and of having the courage of defending our long-standing values. The events of the past, their impact on the present and their lessons for today will be made tangible for all generations and all visitors in 2012 by exhibitions, conferences, concerts, competitions, meetings with witnesses and Hungarian Righteous Among the Nations.«

Zsolt Németh

Wallenberg Commemorative Committee, Chairman