

## Holocaust Memorial Day

*Yom HaShoah*, Holocaust Memorial Day, is a Jewish memorial day that takes place on the 27th day of Nisan, in the Hebrew calendar. It is held every year in remembrance of the approximately six million Jews who died in the Holocaust. It is a national holiday in Israel.

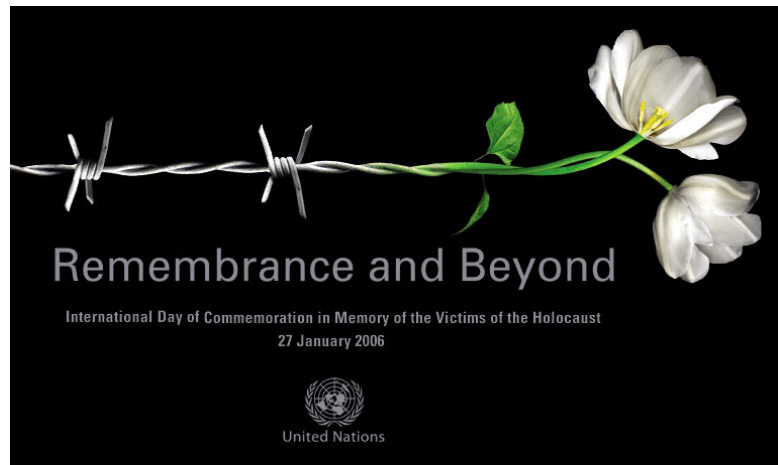
Yet when this day falls on Shabbat, it is moved to

prevent desecration of the Shabbat. It is a national memorial day in Israel. It was originally proposed to be on the 15th of Nisan, the anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising (April 19, 1943), but this was objected to as being the first day of Passover. Instead, the 27th was chosen, eight days before Yom Ha'atzma'ut, or Israeli Independence Day. Yom HaShoah was established by Israeli law in 1959, and was signed by David Ben-Gurion and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, then prime minister of Israel and president of Israel, respectively.

Shoah is the Hebrew word for "catastrophe." It is the term used to describe the conflagration that swept up six million Jewish souls between 1938 and 1945. A war was waged against the Jews in which unspeakable atrocities were perpetrated against a defenseless people. Men and women, young and old alike, were butchered at the hands of the Nazis. Every year, on Yom HaShoah, we remember the martyrs who sanctified the name of G-d in the camps, the ghettos, and in the gas chambers.

The use of "Shoah" to describe the tragedy of Europe is a modern invention, quite similar to the word "Holocaust" in English. This could be taken to imply that the Holocaust was a singular event, a tragedy without equal. If we look at the Holocaust as a singular event, we may be lulled into the belief that anti-Semitism is a passing phenomenon, and only a small remembrance is required in order to ensure that no other man arises who tries to kill "from the youth to the old man, babies and women, in one day..." as we read in Megillat (scroll of) Esther. Therefore it is important that we recognize that events over the last 2000 years, though much further from our recollection, are just as much a part of the tragic element of Jewish history. When the Second Temple was destroyed, only swords were available - those who wished to murder us did not have modern tools of mass destruction at their disposal - and yet they still killed hundreds of thousands. In addition, that destruction reduced us from a sovereign nation to a scattered and lonely people, setting the stage for the other tragedies that followed. We still await restoration of a rebuilt Jerusalem, the City of Peace, may it come speedily in our days. None of this reduces the mind-bending tragedy of 50 years ago - nor should we be guilty of forgetting those other tragedies that came before.

Yet despite this attempt to annihilate all Jews, HaShem remains faithful to His



covenant with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. On the fifth of Iyar 5708, May 14, 1948 Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, declared the country's independence at a Tel Aviv gathering, and the State of Israel was re-born. However, less than 24 hours after that announcement, the neighboring Arab countries declared war on Israel. The Jewish state survived, but the bloody battle cost many soldiers, in the ragtag army, their lives.