

2015-J1904

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION commending the Albanian people for protecting and saving the lives of all Jews, both native and refugee, living in or traveling through Albania during the Holocaust

WHEREAS, It is the practice of this Legislative Body to commemorate and extol the brave actions and efforts of groups and individuals who put human decency above their own safety and well-being; and

WHEREAS, The State of New York celebrates and applauds the people of Albania, who have fostered a historic relationship with the Jewish community and exemplified how tolerance and acceptance of others both represents and strengthens the fabric of the communities in the State of New York and across our nation; and

WHEREAS, New York State is home to a large population of Albanian-Americans, many of whom have made significant contributions to both our State and Nation; and

WHEREAS, Based on their unique history of religious tolerance, Albanians of all social classes and religious beliefs sheltered and protected Jews, even at the risk of their own lives, beginning even before Mussolini's Fascists invaded in 1939; and

WHEREAS, At the start of World War II, approximately 200 Jews lived in the Republic of Albania, and approximately 2,000 Jews escaped to Albania from Western Europe and the Balkans region; and

WHEREAS, After Germany occupied Albania in 1943, Albanian leaders, in an extraordinary act of courage, not only refused to provide a list of Jews living in Albania, but instructed Albanian clerks to issue false identity papers to protect all Jews who traveled to and hid throughout the country; and

WHEREAS, BESA, a code of honor deeply rooted in the Albanian society and observed even nowadays, dictates a moral behavior that one take

responsibility for the lives of others, without exception, in case of need; and

WHEREAS, Due to the exceptional Albanian code of honor, no Jewish family in Albania was surrendered to the Fascists or the Nazis, and the entire native and refugee Jewish community in Albania during World War II survived the Holocaust; and

WHEREAS, Due to the exceptional behavior of the Albanian Nation as a whole, Albania had more Jewish residents after World War II than before World War II; and

WHEREAS, In the course of the last few decades, various authenticated publications have further helped uncover the Albanian story of rescuing Jews, such as Jewish-American author and philanthropist Harvey Sarnier's original published work THE JEWS OF ALBANIA in 1992, and the Autobiography of Irene Grunbaum titled ESCAPE THROUGH THE BALKANS; and

WHEREAS, World-renowned photographer Norman Gershman through his extensive interviewing and photographing of rescuers and survivors, had his work published by the prestigious SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY PRESS; this inspired the movie BESA THE PROMISE, which has further shed light on the extraordinary story of Albanians saving the Jews and the humanity of the Albanian people; and

WHEREAS, The heroic deeds of hundreds of Albanians who rescued Jews during World War II are now recognized by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Museum in Jerusalem, Israel, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC; and

WHEREAS, Yad Vashem has thus far designated 73 Albanians as 'Righteous Persons' and Albania as one of the 'Righteous Among the Nations'; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commend the Albanian people for protecting and saving the lives of all Jews, both native and refugee, living in or traveling through Albania during the Holocaust, in conjunction with the visit of the esteemed

President of Albania, His Excellency Bujar Nishani, to the New York State Legislature on Tuesday, May 5, 2015; and be it further RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause further to commend Yad Vashem in Israel and to encourage others to recognize Albanians who took action to protect Jews during the Holocaust for their great courage and heroism; and be it further RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor of the State of New York; and His Excellency Bujar Nishani, President of Albania.