

Yom Kippur Morning

5774

A word before our prayer of peace.

50 years ago at the March on Washington, Rabbi Joachim Prinz nearly stole the show when he spoke before Dr. King. In part, here are Rabbi Prinz's words:

"When I was the rabbi of the Jewish community in Berlin under the Hitler regime, I learned many things. The most important thing that I learned under those most tragic circumstances was that bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent problem. The most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful and the most tragic problem is silence.

"A great people which had created a great civilization," Prinz said, "had become a nation of silent onlookers. They remained silent in the face of hate, in the face of brutality and in the face of mass murder."

"America must not become a nation of onlookers. America must not remain silent."

Tonight, I condemn Syrian President Assad's use of chemical weapons to kill more than 1400 of his own people, including some 400 children, as a violation of international law and a crime against humanity. As Jews, we are well acquainted with a tyrannical regime's use of lethal gas to commit mass murder and of the failure of democratic governments to intervene.

I believe that effective action—diplomacy, if possible, and military force, should that fail—is essential to deter the use of weapons of mass destruction by others and reinforce the credibility of U.S. policy concerning such weapons.

I express my deep concern for the State of Israel and its citizens, who have been threatened with retaliation in the event of American military action, and reaffirm my steadfast support for Israel's right to defend its citizens from all who seek to harm them.

We yearn for the arrival of "the days to come" that Isaiah foresaw, when nations "will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks: Nation shall not take up sword against nation; they shall never again know war."

We pray that the Jewish New Year, recently begun, will see the dawning of peace for the entire human family.

Amen.