

Prince William Has 'Profoundly Moving Experience' on Trip to Israel

Prince William envisaged a strong future for Israel while making the first official British royal visit to the country on Tuesday and pledged to commemorate the Holocaust that contributed to its foundation.

Speaking at a reception in his honor at the residence of the British Ambassador to Israel, William said his visit earlier to Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial center in Jerusalem had been a "profoundly moving experience."

He told dignitaries including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that as older generations were fading away, it was up to him and other younger people to carry on the commemoration of the Holocaust.

"I am well aware that the responsibility falls now to my generation to keep the memory alive of that great crime as the Holocaust generation passes on. And I commit myself to doing this."

After a brief opening greeting in Hebrew, William added: "Israel's remarkable story is partly one of remembering its terrible past but also looking forward to a much more hopeful future ... the modern story is one of inventing, creating, innovating and striding confidently into its future."

Earlier in Jerusalem, he met Netanyahu and Israeli President Reuven Rivlin. On Wednesday he will meet Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank.

Following his engagements in Jerusalem, William went to Tel Aviv and, sporting sunglasses and an open-necked shirt,

strolled along the Mediterranean shore, chatting with beachgoers and quipping, "I should have brought my swimming trunks."

William's trip is at the behest of the British government. Until now it had been British policy not to make an official royal visit until the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was resolved. British officials have given no detailed explanation for the change in policy.

YAD VASHEM

At Yad Vashem, he met descendants of Jews hidden from the Nazis by his great-grandmother. Wearing a black skullcap, William laid a wreath at Yad Vashem's Hall of Remembrance, where an eternal flame flickers and the names of extermination and concentration camps are engraved in the floor.

"Terrifying," William said, viewing a display at the memorial's museum of shoes taken by the Nazis from Jews at Majdanek death camp. "(I'm) trying to comprehend the scale."

Tens of thousands of Jews and other victims were killed at the camp, near Lublin in what is now Poland.

After the tour, the prince—second in line to the British throne—was greeted by Netanyahu and his wife, Sara, at their official residence against the backdrop of British and Israeli flags.

There, the prince met relatives of the late Rachel Cohen, who was hidden from the Gestapo, along with two of her five children, by Princess Alice, the mother of Britain's 97-year-old Prince Philip, in her palace in Greece.

The Greek royal family—Princess Alice was married to Prince Andrew of Greece—had been acquainted with Cohen's late husband, Haimaki, a former member of Greece's parliament.

"You must be very proud of your great-grandmother, who saved

defenseless Jews,” Netanyahu told William.

Princess Alice was recognized as one of the “righteous among nations,” gentiles who rescued Jews, by Yad Vashem in 1993. A devout Christian, she is buried on the slopes of Jerusalem’s Mount of Olives. William is due to visit her tomb on Thursday.

On Wednesday in the occupied West Bank, after seeing Abbas, William is scheduled to meet Palestinian youngsters.

At a meeting with Rivlin, the prince, on a visit described by Britain as non-political, said he hoped “peace in the area can be achieved.” Israeli-Palestinian peace talks collapsed in 2014.

“I had a very moving tour around Yad Vashem this morning, which really taught me quite a lot more than I thought I already knew about the true horrors of what happened to the Jews over the war,” William said at the meeting with Rivlin.

The prince also spoke at Yad Vashem with two men who survived the Nazi genocide through British intervention.

Henry Foner, 86, and Paul Alexander, 80, were among thousands of Jewish children taken in by Britain as part of the 1930s “Kindertransport” from a continental Europe that was falling to German conquest.

“I said to his Royal Highness that this is a unique opportunity for me to express my thanks to the British people for opening their homes to me and to the other 10,000 children who came,” Alexander said. {eoa}

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