

Statement by Human Rights First on Bálint Hóman Statue in Hungary

Human Rights First urges Hungary to stop the installation of a statue commemorating Bálint Hóman, who in the 1930s and 1940s directly contributed to the persecution and death of hundreds of thousands of Hungarians during the Holocaust. This statue would send a troubling message to Hungarian citizens that this tragic and shameful period in history merits some sort of reverence. Any steps that the Hungarian government takes to “rehabilitate” the legacy of virulently antisemitic political leaders will further isolate it from the international community.

Human Rights First has for many years worked to combat hate crimes, antisemitism, and anti-Roma discrimination in Europe. At home and abroad, we press the U.S. government to combat antisemitism with the urgency and comprehensiveness it demands. That means supporting frontline activists. And emphasizing it in diplomacy. And building coalitions. And pressing countries to crack down on antisemitic violence. And confronting leaders—including U.S. allies—when they propagate or tolerate antisemitism and other forms of intolerance.

We released a major report in 2014, “We’re not Nazis, but...” that details how the Hungarian government’s actions over the past four years have eroded checks and balances, threatened civil society and the free press, curtailed judicial independence, and failed to reverse growing antisemitism and a rising tide of discrimination against Roma. At the same time, the openly antisemitic far-right party Jobbik has injected a new potency into xenophobic and antisemitic attitudes in Hungary.

We welcome the leadership of U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism Ira Forman, U.S. Ambassador to Hungary Colleen Bell, and other senior U.S. officials by speaking out against the plans to erect this statue. Hungary is a crucial ally to the United States and plays a pivotal role in the Transatlantic Alliance. As part of this multifaceted relationship, the Obama Administration has a duty to speak out when Hungary pursues a path contrary to democratic values and human rights.

The planned monument would dishonor the memory of those who perished in the Holocaust. The use of public funds to commemorate Hóman is a shameful dereliction of Hungary’s role as Chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. The Stockholm Declaration, which is the foundation of this intergovernmental body, declares: “We share a commitment to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and to honor those who stood against it.” Hungary will find itself on the wrong side of history and betray the memories of its citizens if it abandons this common standard and continues its plans to honor the legacy of Bálint Hóman.

This is not simply a Jewish issue. We view antisemitism everywhere as a grave threat to human rights. Antisemitic violence prevents Jews from exercising their fundamental freedoms and promotes a climate of fear. History shows that antisemitism is also a harbinger of broader societal

dysfunction and thrives where intolerance takes hold. Left unchecked, it leads to further oppression, undermining democratic values and fundamental freedoms.

We will not stand idly by while Hungary pays tribute to those who espoused hatred and intolerance. Hungarian citizens deserve better. We call on Prime Minister Orbán to honor his pledge for “zero tolerance” on antisemitism. We stand alongside Hungarian civil society organizations, the Jewish community, and other allies, including the U.S. government and civil society organizations, to hold Hungary accountable to democratic values.

Today’s seminar, bringing together leading historians, civil society representatives, and faith-based organizations, exemplifies exactly the kind of broad coalition building that is so critical to combating antisemitism and intolerance across the globe. We hope that today’s critical dialogue will spur further collaboration and concrete steps for action.