

Holocaust survivors get COVID vaccine on Auschwitz Liberation Day



Joseph Zalman Kleinman, 92, a Holocaust survivor, receives his second dose of the vaccine for COVID-19, in Jerusalem. (Photo: Maya Alleruzzo / AP Photo)

Vienna, January 27 (RHC)-- Hundreds of Holocaust survivors in Austria and Slovakia are getting the first dose of the coronavirus vaccine, acknowledging their past suffering with a special tribute 76 years after the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp, where the Nazis killed more than one million Jews and others.

More than 400 Austrian survivors, most in their 80s or 90s, got their first shot on Wednesday at Vienna's largest vaccination centre in the Austrian capital's convention center. "We owe this to them," said Erika Jakubovits, the Jewish Community of Vienna organiser of the vaccination drive. "They have suffered so much trauma and have felt even more insecure during this pandemic." Some of the survivors were brought there by shuttle or by ambulance, while others came in with their children.

Jakubovits organized the vaccination drive with the support of the Austrian health ministry and Vienna city officials. Twelve doctors, all members of the Viennese Jewish community, volunteered to vaccinate the survivors. Although organized to take place on what is known as International Holocaust Remembrance Day, vaccinations were not being offered only to survivors of the Holocaust, but also all other Jews in the area older than 85.

Some survivors from Vienna's 8,000-person strong Jewish community had already received the vaccination in December when residents of the community's nursing home were vaccinated, Jakubovits said. More broadly, a majority of elderly Austrians living in nursing homes have already received the first shot of the vaccine, Austrian news agency APA reported.

Earlier this week, the president of the European Jewish Congress (EJC) called on all countries in the European Union to ensure that Holocaust survivors have access to coronavirus vaccines as quickly as possible. With the end of WWII now more than seven decades ago, the world's approximately 240,000 Holocaust survivors are all elderly. Since many were deprived of proper nutrition when they were young, they suffer from numerous medical issues today. In addition, many live isolated lives, having lost their entire families, and suffer psychologically as a result of their persecution under the Nazis.

More than six million European Jews were murdered by the Nazis during the Third Reich. The vast majority of those killed in the Auschwitz death camp were Jews from across Europe, but other non-Jewish prisoners, including Poles, Roma and Soviet soldiers, were also among the victims.

About 192,000 Jews lived in Austria before World War II. After the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany in 1938, which was enthusiastically supported by many Austrians, more than 100,000 Jews fled the country. Tens of thousands were murdered in death camps and by the end of the war in 1945, only very few Austrian Jews remained in the country, most having hidden from the Nazis.

"Throughout their lives, they have shown mighty strength of spirit, but in the current crisis, many have sadly died alone and in pain, or are now fighting for their lives, and many others are suffering from extreme isolation," said Moshe Kantor, the head of the EJC. "We have a duty to survivors, to ensure that they are able to live their last years in dignity, without fear, and in the company of their loved ones."

<https://www.radiohc.cu/en/noticias/internacionales/245878-holocaust-survivors-get-covid-vaccine-on-auschwitz-liberation-day>



Radio Habana Cuba