

Outrage over Justin Trudeau's standing ovation for Nazi criminal during Ukrainian president's visit to Canada



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (C) with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (R), acknowledges a Canadian-Ukrainian war veteran after addressing the House of Commons in Ottawa, Canada, on September 22, 2023. (Photo by Sean Kilpatrick / POOL / AFP)

Ottawa, September 25 (RHC)-- The speaker of Canada's House of Commons has apologised for praising an individual who served in a Nazi unit during World War II in a session attended by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and visiting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Speaker Anthony Rota recognised Yaroslav Hunka, 98, as a "Ukrainian hero, a Canadian hero", saying "we thank him for all his service" before the Canadian Parliament on Friday.

Hunka served in World War II as a member of the 14th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS, according to the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center, a Jewish human rights group, that demanded an apology. The center said Hunka's ties to the Nazi war machine "are well-documented". Both Zelenskyy and Trudeau joined in acknowledging Hunka during the parliament session with applause.

Rota took responsibility for what he characterised as an oversight, calling the initiative "entirely my own." "I have subsequently become aware of more information which causes me to regret my decision," he said in a statement issued on Sunday, offering his "deepest apologies to Jewish communities in Canada and around the world."

The recognition came following the visit to parliament by Zelenskyy, who thanked Canada for its assistance in Ukraine's war against Russia. Rota said no one, including fellow parliamentarians or the Ukrainian delegation, was aware of his plans or remarks beforehand.

Following Zelenskyy's remarks, Rota acknowledged Hunka – who was seated in the gallery – praising him for fighting for Ukrainian independence against the Russians. Hunka received two standing ovations from those gathered. As Canadian lawmakers cheered, Zelenskyy raised his fist in acknowledgement and Hunka saluted.

"At a time of rising anti-Semitism and Holocaust distortion, it is incredibly disturbing to see Canada's parliament rise to applaud an individual who was a member of a unit in the Waffen-SS – a Nazi military branch responsible for the murder of Jews and others," the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center said in a statement. "An explanation must be provided as to how this individual entered the hallowed halls of Canadian parliament and received recognition from the Speaker of the House and a standing ovation."

Russia's RIA state news agency cited Russia's ambassador to Canada, Oleg Stepanov, as saying the embassy will send a letter to Trudeau and a note to the Canadian foreign ministry on Monday. "We will, of course, demand clarification from the Canadian government," Stepanov was quoted as saying. INTERACTIVE-Ukraine's counteroffensive under way

Dominique Arel, chair of Ukrainian studies at the University of Ottawa, said the incident "is highly problematic." "We have the issue of symbolism here, the optics of serving in a military unit whose logo is that of arguably the greatest criminal organisation in the 20th century ... so obviously the optics are not good," Arel told CBC News.

B'nai Brith Canada's CEO Michael Mostyn said it was outrageous that parliament honoured a former member of a Nazi unit, saying Ukrainian "ultranationalist ideologues" who volunteered for the Galicia Division "dreamed of an ethnically homogenous Ukrainian state and endorsed the idea of ethnic cleansing".

"We understand an apology is forthcoming. We expect a meaningful apology. Parliament owes an apology to all Canadians for this outrage, and a detailed explanation as to how this could possibly have taken place at the centre of Canadian democracy," Mostyn said.

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