

Canadian parliament speaker steps down after honoring Nazi

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Ottawa, September 27 (RHC)--The speaker of Canada's Parliament has stepped down, days after he honoured a man who fought in a Nazi unit during World War II as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy visited the House of Commons last week.

Addressing Canadian lawmakers in Ottawa on Tuesday afternoon, Speaker Anthony Rota said he was resigning "with a heavy heart." "This House is above any of us. Therefore, I must step down as your speaker," said Rota, who invited Yaroslav Hunka to Friday's special parliamentary session in the House of Commons, where he recognised the 98-year-old as a "Ukrainian hero".

Hunka served in the 14th Waffen Grenadier Division of the Nazi's SS military unit, said the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center, a Jewish community group.

He received standing ovations in the House of Commons, including from Zelenskyy and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who were in attendance.

"I reiterate my profound regret for my error in recognising an individual in the House," Rota said in Parliament on Tuesday afternoon, as he faced mounting calls to resign from advocacy groups, Canadian lawmakers and even top members of his own Liberal Party.

"That public recognition has caused pain to individuals and communities, including the Jewish community in Canada and around the world, in addition to survivors of Nazi atrocities in Poland, among other nations," he said.

His resignation will come into effect at the end of the day on Wednesday, Rota added.

"And I think the speaker should listen to members of the House and step down," she said.

The progressive New Democratic Party's House leader, Peter Julian, said earlier this week that Rota had made "an unforgivable error that puts the entire House in disrepute".

Asked about his resignation on Tuesday afternoon, Julian told reporters that steps need to be taken "to ensure that this never happens again in a Canadian Parliament." He added that it remained unclear when a vote on the next speaker would take place.

The speaker of the House of Commons is elected by fellow parliament members to preside over the proceedings in the chamber.

The episode came as Zelenskyy, who is Jewish, on Friday addressed Canadian parliamentarians for the second time since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of his country in February of last year.

The Russian authorities justified their continued assault on Ukraine as part of a push to "de-Nazify" the country. Kyiv and its allies have dismissed that as Russian propaganda, accusing Moscow of trying to conduct a land grab.

Russia said it was "outrageous" that Hunka was honoured in Canada. "Such sloppiness of memory is outrageous," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

"Many Western countries, including Canada, have raised a young generation that does not know who fought whom or what happened during the second world war. And they know nothing about the threat of fascism."

Roland Paris, director of the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Ottawa, said earlier this week that while Rota's quick apology was welcomed, it did not go far enough.

"It was so egregious – so injurious to Canada, our Parliament and our Ukrainian partners, and so offensive to Jews everywhere – he needs to resign," Paris wrote on social media.

Trudeau, who described the events as "deeply embarrassing" for Canada, also has faced questions from opposition Conservative Party lawmakers over what he knew about Hunka's background and how he was vetted.

Pierre Poilievre, the leader of the Conservatives, earlier on Tuesday accused the prime minister of failing "to have his massive diplomatic and intelligence apparatus vet and prevent honouring a Nazi".

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