

Egun on guztioi. Eusko Jaurlaritzaren izenean gaur ekitaldi honetan parte hartzea, atsegina ez ezik, ohore handia ere bada niretzat. Joan den astearteko Gobernu Kontseiluan, adierazpen ofizial bat onartu genuen, aitortza eta esker ona adieraziaz. Duela 70 urte gertatutakoaren aitortza eginez, eta Jaurlaritzaren eta euskal gizarte osoaren esker ona adieraziaz, duela 70 urte Gerra Zibiletik ihesi etorri ziren umeak hain esku zabal hartu zituzten herri eta agintariei.

The Basque Government, in the last Cabinet Meeting, recalled the evacuation of civilians and passed a statement of acknowledgment and gratitude.

Commemoration and gratitude, those are the key words here today.

Commemoration of what happened 70 years ago, the dramatic evacuation of civilians, children and women, led by the Basque Government, after the bombing of the towns of Durango and Gernika. At that time, President Jose Antonio Agirre said on the radio: *I would like to believe that other countries will come and help those three hundred thousand children and women heading to Bilbao.*

France and Great Britain offered their help and the evacuation planned by the Basque Government was carried out.

The first ship left Santurtzi the 6<sup>th</sup> of May, at night, carrying 2,500 children and 1,000 women. From then on, 30 ships carried 116,746 (one hundred and sixteen thousand) people. The Ministry of Social Welfare, responsible for the coordination of that huge operation, estimated that 37,930 children were evacuated: 22,234 of them to France; just over six thousand (6,200) found shelter in Catalunya, when this country was controlled by the republican army; 3,956 were taken in by Great Britain; 3,201 in Belgium, 1,899 in the Soviet Union; 245 in Switzerland and 105 in Denmark.

Today, the present Basque Government wants to commemorate and to thank the task undertaken by the Ministries of Social Welfare, Justice and Health of that first Basque Government. We want to acknowledge the job done by the Minister of Social Welfare, Juan Gracia, member of the Socialist Party; by the Minister of Justice, Jesus Maria Leizaola, member of the Nationalist Party, and by Alfredo Espinosa, member of the Republican Party and Minister of Health, executed by Franco's army, and by his successor Heliodoro de la Torre, member of the

Nationalist Party. And we want to underline the political diversity of that Government who joined forces to defend freedom and democracy.

Today, the present Basque Government wants to commemorate and to thank all the help we received in such difficult times, 70 years ago. To all the associations, organizations, public or private, to all the countries that generously offered shelter to our children. Neither do we wish to forget all the teachers, nurses, priests, assistants... who accompanied those children in their exodus.

Help and assistance came from all the corners of the world. It is not possible to mention all of them now, but, as we are here today in Southampton, let us remember what happened here in May 1937, because it highlights exactly what I'm talking about. The ship "Habana" arrived in Southampton on the 22nd of May, carrying just under four thousand (3,861) children, 95 teachers, 120 assistants and 15 priests.

On behalf of the Basque Government I want to express our gratitude to the Basque Children's Committee, set up here in Great Britain to help in the evacuation of our children. And I want to mention particularly the duchess of Atholl, member of the Conservative Party, and president of the committee for Basque children, I want to mention the job done by the Salvation Army, by the catholic, anglican, and Quaker churches of Great Britain, by the Trade Unions Congress, by the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party and the Labor Party, and above all, I want to mention Ms. Leah Manning, member of of the Labor Party, and member of the Parliament, who went to the Basque Country and made possible the evacuation of the children. We are in debt to all of them.

And last, but not least, we want to pay a heartfelt tribute to all of you who were forced to leave the Basque Country 70 years ago. To those who are still alive, as well as to those who already died. You had to flee your country, and many of you were not able to come back again. You are in our memory today.

And I wish to finish with the address by Bonifacio Etxegaray, member of the Academy for Basque Studies, broadcast from "Radio Euzkadi", on the fourth of May, 1937:

"Once more is our country rent by fratricidal wars. This bitter and painful episode is a parenthesis. The unhappy days will pass and from the ruins of Gernika will arise another city as smiling and as endearing as she was. And with her Euskadi shall live again. She will respond to

the impulse of progress and the needs of time; she will sing her past history and renew her life whilst nothing will be remembered of those peoples and countries who established their laws upon the rule of violence and oppression. Gernika shall live again, Euskadi be forever free and world democracy prevail”.

Today, Euskadi is responding to the impulse of progress, but we don't want the times where laws were established upon the rule of violence and oppression be forgotten, because keeping those times in our memories is the best way to prevent them from happening again ever in the future.

No quiero terminar sin agradecer de corazón la labor callada de tantos años de personas como Helvecia Hidalgo, Herminio Martínez o Vicente Cañada. Vosotros, tanto en Euskadi como aquí, en Gran Bretaña, habéis mantenido viva la llama de lo que sucedió. Representáis, con vuestro testimonio, esas “marcas” que subraya Bernardo Atxaga en su última obra, marcas de nuestra historia. Vosotros, y la labor de otros como Manuel Moreno, Natalia Benjamín o Carmen Kilner al frente de la Asociación de los niños vascos del 37' UK, o de Enrike Urkijo, presidente de la misma asociación en Euskadi, supone la mejor garantía de que el testimonio y el sufrimiento de aquellos niños y niñas de la guerra, de sus familias, llegará a las futuras generaciones; y todos sabemos que ése, el mantener vivo el recuerdo de lo que pasó, es el mejor antídoto para que episodios semejantes no sucedan de nuevo en el futuro.

Eskerrik asko.

Southampton, 2007ko maiatzaren 26a