

## **RAVENSBRÜCK COMMEMORATION, APRIL 13-14, 2024**

### **Commemorating Ukrainian Voices at Ravensbrück**

**By Khrystia Eliashevskya-Chraibi**

The Central Commemoration Ceremony unfolded before the former austere Nazi Administrative Building, a solemn gathering to honour the memory of those who suffered within the confines of the Ravensbrück Concentration Camp.

The first day commenced with the Forum of Descendants of Second and Third Generation, a gathering of those whose mothers/grandmothers/aunts, etc. endured the atrocities of the Ravensbrück Concentration Camp. Official speeches and reports preceded poignant testimonies from descendants across various nations. Particularly harrowing were the accounts shared by members of the German Sinti and Roma community, and women from former soviet republics – groups often overlooked by historical narratives, yet whose stories demand to be heard and preserved.

Seizing the opportunity, I stood to present our newly published book, “Ukrainian Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp: Voices of Prisoners,” a dual-language edition in English and Ukrainian. During the break, several individuals approached me, their curiosity piqued, leading to engaging discussions where I provided further context and details surrounding this pivotal work.

After the intermission, the talks continued, delving into the profound trauma and suffering endured by the survivors and their families. Some descendants became visibly emotional, their mother's incarceration having cast a lingering shadow over their lives. I, too, offered a brief testimony of my mother's experiences, though she seldom spoke openly about her imprisonment.

Our small group – Taica Replansky, Orysia Marciuk, Oksana Marciuk, Yarema Grant and I – then made our way to the Ukrainian Memorial plaque, placing candles, flags, and flowers at its base in a solemn tribute. Taica and I ventured further, carrying a Ukrainian banner to the crematorium and visiting the expansive Siemens & Halske territory, where our mothers and countless other prisoners were subjected to grueling 12-hour workdays on assembly lines or in various workshops. The site, now a vast, wild park, bore no remnants of its former structures, likely demolished by the Soviet "liberators" who repurposed the camp as a military warehouse after April 30, 1945.

The highlight of the third day was our meeting with a group of remarkable Ukrainian women from Berlin. Ukrainian refugees, long-time residents, and many others answered the call launched by Oleksandra Bienert and the Allianz, arriving in several carloads at the Ravensbrück Memorial Site early Sunday morning. At last, we were no longer alone! The blue-and-yellow colours were everywhere! The Ukrainian flag fluttered proudly in the wind as we proceeded solemnly to the Die Tragende Memorial, laid a wreath, and called out a resounding “Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the Heroes!” Our voices were heard, and our presence was noted. We then walked up to the lake and threw the flowers into the water, remembering...

It was an exhausting and emotionally draining day, yet a necessary pilgrimage to honour the resilience and endurance of those who suffered unimaginable cruelties within the walls of Ravensbrück.

As we parted ways, we promised to reunite next year for the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Liberation of the Ravensbrück Concentration Camp, united in our commitment to ensuring that the echoes of the past resonate in the present. Lest we forget the imperative of “NEVER AGAIN!”