

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**  
--  
**REMARKS TO THE  
UNITED NATIONS MEMORIAL CEREMONY MARKING THE INTERNATIONAL  
DAY OF COMMEMORATION IN MEMORY OF THE VICTIMS OF THE  
HOLOCAUST**

**New York, 26 January 2024**

**[as delivered]**

Excellencies, dear friends,

It's a great honour to be with you today to commemorate the memory of the victims of the Holocaust.

I am moved and humbled by the presence of Holocaust survivors and their families, joining us both online and in person.

Each of you carries the memories of communities lost; lives destroyed or changed beyond recognition – and lives rebuilt.

I thank you for sharing those memories with us and with the world.

All of us – leaders and citizens – have a responsibility to listen and to learn from what you have to say. And to act on it:

By condemning these terrible crimes against our common humanity;

By striving to eradicate antisemitism, and all forms of bigotry, hatred and intolerance;

And by finding a way forward to a shared, safe, and inclusive future for our human family.

This is particularly important in today's dangerous and divided world.

And a few short months after Hamas' horrific terror attacks, in which so many innocent Israeli civilians and citizens of other countries were killed.

Excellencies and friends,

Every year on this day – the day of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau – we honour the memory of the victims of the Holocaust.

We come together in solidarity and sorrow, to pay tribute to [the] six million Jewish children, women, and men murdered in the Holocaust.

We grieve the Roma and Sinti.

We mourn the millions of others tortured, starved, and killed by the Nazis and their collaborators.

And, today in particular, in keeping with this year's theme, we recognize the courage of victims and survivors.

There are countless stories of bravery and resilience from the Holocaust:

From those who resisted the Nazis' brutality through armed struggle or quiet dignity;

To the individuals, families and communities providing support, solidarity, and even a semblance of normality, in the face of dehumanisation, deprivation and death;

And survivors who have had the courage to tell their stories to a world that has not always wanted to listen.

Beacons of bravery shone from the hell of Auschwitz itself, and from across the world ravaged by Nazi ideology and hate.

I think of people like Rudolf Vrba, a Slovak teenager who was deported to Auschwitz. With Alfred Wetzler, he achieved the extraordinary feat of breaking out of the camp, to warn the world of the Nazis' unspeakable crimes.

I think of Róża Robota, a young Polish woman, who plotted with others to destroy the crematoria. She was tortured and hanged by the Nazis – never revealing the secrets of the Auschwitz resistance of which she was a part.

And I think of those thousands of acts of courage and fortitude of which we will never know:

The parents who contained their terror to comfort a child;

The prisoners who risked Nazi wrath to perform small acts of kindness;

And the individuals who found the strength to retain their sense of self, despite all attempts to demolish it.

We remember and revere today all such acts of bravery.

Excellencies and friends,

The antisemitism that fuelled the Holocaust did not start with the Nazis. Nor did it end with their defeat.

The Holocaust was preceded by thousands of years of discrimination, expulsion, exile and extermination, including by my own country, Portugal.

Today, we are witnessing hate spreading at alarming speed.

Online, it has moved from the margins to the mainstream.

And Holocaust denial and distortion are proliferating.

It is up to all of us to defend the truth. And to defend our common humanity.

Working together, we must combat online lies and hate.

We must promote Holocaust education – as a critical part of our defence against ignorance, indifference, and intolerance.

And, crucially, we must listen to survivors, and we must remember:

That demonization of the other and disdain for diversity is a danger to everyone.

That no society is immune to intolerance – and worse.

And that bigotry against one group is bigotry against all.

As the former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, Jonathan Sacks, said: “The hate that begins with Jews never ends with Jews”.

Excellencies, friends,

Our common humanity is at the heart of the United Nations.

Racism and bigotry are a violation of everything we stand for.

We are determined to fight it on all its forms.

For me, this is a lifelong commitment.

For the United Nations, [it is] a foundational mission.

And today it is more important than ever, especially in the wake of the horrific 7 October Hamas attacks that claimed the lives of more than one thousand Israelis and others, injured many more and resulted in the brutal seizing of hostages. Hostages that must be immediately and unconditionally released.

In the last several months, we have seen an outburst of antisemitism and anti-Muslim bigotry around the world.

Every one of us must resolve to stand up against the forces of hate, discrimination, and division.

We must condemn antisemitism – unequivocally – whenever and wherever we encounter it.

I am pleased that the High Representative of the UN Alliance of Civilizations – [Mr.] Miguel Moratinos – is serving as the United Nations’ Focal Point to enhance global efforts to address antisemitism.

And we must equally condemn all other forms of racism, prejudice and religious bigotry, including anti-Muslim hatred and violence against minority Christian communities.

Let us never be silent in the face of discrimination, and never tolerant of intolerance.

Let us speak out for human rights and the dignity of all.

Let us never lose sight of each other’s humanity, and never let down our guard.

To all who confront prejudice and persecution, I say clearly: you are not alone.

The United Nations stands with you.

And to all those – past and present – who have had the courage to share their stories of the Holocaust, so the world can know the truth, I say: thank you.



Bookmark the Spokesperson’s website: <http://www.un.org/sg/en/spokesperson>