

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**REMARKS AT UNITED NATIONS HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL CEREMONY
New York, 28 January 2019**

[as delivered]

We are here together to remember the victims of the Holocaust – the six million Jews and many others murdered during a period of unprecedented, calculated cruelty, when human dignity was cast aside for a racial ideology.

I extend a special welcome to the Holocaust survivors with us today, especially Mr. Marian Turski and Ms. Inge Auerbacher, who will share their testimony.

This International Day marks the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp 74 years ago yesterday. I also pay tribute to the veterans here today for their role in bringing the war and Holocaust to an end.

Yesterday was, by the way, also the 75th anniversary of the lifting of the siege of Leningrad. That prolonged the blockade -- 872 days of siege, starvation and suffering – that was a horror within the horror.

As we remember, we also reaffirm our resolve to fight the hatred that still plagues our world today. In fact, it is necessary - more and more - that we sound an alarm.

It is just three months since a man armed to the teeth entered the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh shouting “all Jews must die”.

He murdered 11 worshippers observing Shabbat. It was the worst anti-Semitic attack in the history of the United States.

Last month at a Jewish cemetery near Strasbourg, in France, vandals smeared swastikas on dozens of tombstones and defaced a monument to Holocaust victims.

And just days ago in Bulgaria, stones were thrown through the window of Sofia’s central synagogue.

I would like to be able to say that these incidents were aberrations, or that they are only the last gasps of a prejudice that deserves to die.

But sadly, what we are instead seeing is the flame of a centuries-old fire gaining in intensity.

Not only is anti-Semitism still strong – it is getting worse.

We must rise up against rising anti-Semitism.

According to the Anti-Defamation League, anti-Semitic incidents in the United States increased by 57 per cent in 2017.

The European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency reported last year that 28 per cent of Jews had experienced some form of harassment just for being Jewish. Many added that fears for their safety have led them to stay away from Jewish events – or even to contemplate emigrating.

Another poll in Europe by CNN revealed the strong persistence of classic anti-Semitic motifs.

In fact, the old anti-Semitism is back.

At the same time, we are seeing attempts to rewrite the history of the Holocaust, to distort its magnitude and to sanitize the wartime records of leaders, citizens and societies.

Meanwhile, neo-Nazi groups are proliferating.

A recent Public Broadcasting System Frontline programme conducted an in-depth exploration of one of the extremist and white supremacist organizations in the United States that promote hatred against Jews, and also other minorities, homosexuals and others.

Their views are right out of "Mein Kampf". They have, by the way, a similar book written by their leader.

Their recruitment methods target the disaffected.

They seek out people with military experience – and encourage sympathizers to join the armed forces to gain weapons training.

And the massacre in Pittsburgh was precisely in keeping with their advocacy of violent, so-called "lone wolf" attacks.

Inevitably, where there is anti-Semitism, no one else is safe. Across the world, we are seeing a disturbing rise in other forms of bigotry.

Attacks on Muslims in several societies are on the rise, sometimes even outpacing other forms of hatred.

Rohingyas, Yazidis and many others have faced persecution simply for who they are.

Intolerance today spreads at lightning speed across the Internet and social media.

Perhaps most disturbingly, hate is moving into the mainstream – in liberal democracies and authoritarian systems alike.

We have seen this throughout the debate on human mobility, which has featured a stream of invective, falsely linking refugees and migrants to terrorism and scapegoating them for many of society's ills.

Major political parties are incorporating ideas from the fringes in their propaganda and electoral campaigns.

Parties once rightly considered pariahs are gaining influence over governments.

And where once some political figures used the so-called "dog whistle" to signal their followers, today they also feel able to trumpet their noxious views for all to hear.

Political discourse is being coarsened.

And with each broken norm, the pillars of humanity are weakened.

That is part of what Hannah Arendt identified as the path towards totalitarianism. We should not exaggerate the comparisons to the 1930s. But equally let us not ignore the similarities.

We see some societies wanting to turn back the clock on diversity. Political establishments have a profound and growing trust deficit. The demonization of others rages on. Such hatred is easy to uncork, and very hard to put back in the bottle.

One urgent challenge today is to heed the lessons of history and the Holocaust.

First, by keeping memory alive. A recent poll in Europe found that one third of people say they know little or nothing about the Holocaust.

Among millennials, some two-thirds had no idea Auschwitz was a death camp.

As the number of survivors dwindles, it falls to us all to carry their testimony to future generations. This is our duty and we must make sure that what the memory of survivors is able to tell will persist forever.

Education is crucial – about the Holocaust, about genocide and crimes against humanity, about racism and the history of slavery.

The United Nations and the Holocaust Outreach Programme has activities in dozens of countries, and we are strongly committed to expanding its reach.

And, we must stand up to those who disseminate hatred.

I have asked my Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide to assess the efforts of the UN system in countering hate speech and to devise a global plan of action to deepen this essential work.

We had, just last Saturday in Park East Synagogue, a very moving testimony from Rabbi Schneier proposing that we should gather Ministers of Education all over the world to make sure that in schools these questions are clearly introduced in the curricula and that students will never be able to deny these facts.

Because indeed, countering hate speech is essential to preventing hate crimes.

That means rejecting hate in schools and workplaces, at sporting events and on the street.

And it means reaffirming universal values and equal rights.

Finally, we must bring those rights to life. Proclaiming principles is not enough. Vilifying the violators is not enough.

We must go further by working for a fair globalization, by building democratic societies, and by addressing the roots of the anxieties and angers that make people susceptible to populism and demagoguery.

Governments and international organizations must show they care and make rights real in the lives of all.

One of the great shocks of the Second World War was how a society of such high attainment proved so ripe for Hitler's venom.

In his diaries of the years from 1933 to 1945, Victor Klemperer wrote, and I quote:

“Curious: At the very moment modern technology annuls all frontiers and distances..., the most extreme nationalism is raging.” This was said in the ‘30s.

We are not immune to the same risks today.

Our response must be clear: to strengthen all we do to build the defences, the laws and the mindsets that will uphold the dignity of all, for all time, having the fight against anti-semitism in the front lines.

Thank you very much.



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