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UN marks Holocaust memorial day with exhibitions and pledges of 'never again'



27 January 2011 – The United Nations today honoured the memory of the estimated six million Jews and countless others who perished in the Nazi death camps of the Second World War with ceremonies around the world and pledges to wipe genocide off the face of the Earth.

The General Assembly in 2005 designated 27 January, the date of the 1945 liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest and most notorious of all of the camps, as the International Day in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, and this year's theme pays special tribute to the suffering of women.

“Mothers and daughters, grandmothers, sisters and aunts, they saw their lives irrevocably changed, their families separated and their traditions shattered,” [Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon](#) said in a [message](#). “Yet, despite appalling acts of discrimination, deprivation and cruelty, they consistently found ways to fight back against their persecutors.

“They joined the resistance, rescued those in peril, smuggled food into ghettos and made wrenching sacrifices to keep their children alive. Their courage continues to inspire. On this Holocaust Remembrance Day, let us honour these women and their legacy.

“Let us pledge to create a world where such atrocities can never be repeated. We are all aware that such a future has yet to arrive,” said the Secretary-General.

Paying homage to the millions of Jews and thousands of other victims, including Roma, Slavs, disabled people, homosexuals, Jehovah's witnesses, communists and other political dissidents “whose lives were brutally cut short by the ideology of hatred of the Nazis and their allies,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay stressed that the Holocaust should serve as a reminder of the dangers of marginalization of particular groups and the need for urgent action at the first signs that a climate conducive to genocide is emerging.

“It should remind us that hateful words have the ability to translate into hateful actions. The threat of genocide still remains,” she said in a [message](#).

“While we can never compensate for the Holocaust, or do justice to its millions of victims and their descendants, we can at least ensure that by remembering their suffering, and acting on what we have learned, we can mitigate the suffering of others today and in the future,” she added, stressing the importance of bringing perpetrators to justice.

UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry led a delegation of senior UN staff to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, to commemorate the International Day. As part of their visit, Mr. Serry and Deputy Special Coordinator Maxwell Gaylard laid a wreath in the Hall of Remembrance to remember the six million Jews, and others, killed by the Nazis.

Exhibitions on the Holocaust are being held at various UN offices, including New York, Vienna and Paris, with a travelling exhibit due to visit other centres, including in Africa, all stressing the categorical imperative of never allowing such a catastrophe to be perpetrated again.

The educational-preventive significance of the Day is a major focus of the UN Outreach Programme set up by the General Assembly in 2005 with the UN Department of Public Information (DPI) this year producing a Study Guide – Women and the Holocaust: Courage and Compassion – to help high school students better understand the experiences of Jewish, Roma and Sinti women during the terror brought on them by the Nazis and their collaborators.

“Faced with discrimination, impossible living conditions, and the prospect of death at every turn, these women were determined to meet their families' needs and protect their children to the best of their ability,” UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information Kiyo Akasaka says in a foreword to the Guide.

“As their husbands, sons and fathers were arrested and deported, traditional gender roles changed, placing greater responsibilities upon women in the family and community in the ghettos, and often making the difference between life and death in the camps... Once homemakers and caregivers, women had to work outside the home and adapt to stay alive in the worst of circumstances, even when their children were killed before their eyes.”

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