

UN Sec. Gen. Guterres' Remarks at the UN Memorial Ceremony Marking the Int'l Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust



UN Sec. Gen. Guterres addresses the Holocaust ceremony. Photo: UN.

I want to begin by expressing my deep gratitude to the survivors with us at the United Nations in New York, and those who join online.

You give meaning to our work to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. To defend human rights and dignity. To strive for justice and peace. Your testimonies shocked the conscience of the world. And your courage, resilience, and endurance continue to inspire us.

So from the bottom of my heart, I want to say to you: thank you.

Excellencies,

Ninety years ago this year, the Nazi party came to power in Germany. Within months, they dismantled fundamental constitutional rights and paved the way for totalitarian rule.

Members of Parliament were swiftly arrested, freedom of the press abolished. In Dachau, the first concentration camp was built. In Berlin, books were piled on bonfires. And all over Germany, virulent antisemitism became official government policy. Discrimination and exclusion - codified in law - began almost immediately. Open, organized violence - most notoriously the terror of the Kristallnacht - followed soon after, alongside widespread theft and plunder.

And then the systematic mass murder started. By the end of the war, six million children, women, and men - nearly two out of every three European Jews - had been murdered.

Excellencies,

The rise of National Socialism in Germany was made possible by the indifference - if not connivance - of so many millions.

We now know the terrifying depths of the abyss into which Germany would plunge.

But the alarm bells were already ringing in 1933. Too few bothered to listen, and fewer still spoke out.

Today, we can hear echoes of those same siren songs to hate. From an economic crisis that is breeding discontent...to populist demagogues using the crisis to seduce voters...to runaway misinformation, paranoid conspiracy theories and unchecked hate speech...to growing disregard for human rights and disdain for the rule of law...to surging white supremacist and Neo-Nazi ideologies...to attempts to rewrite history, deny the Holocaust, and rehabilitate collaborators...to rising antisemitism and other forms of religious bigotry and hatred.

At its essence, Holocaust remembrance is a call to be on constant alert.

Never to be silent in the face of hate. Never tolerant of intolerance. Never indifferent to the suffering of others.

After all, hatred does not start in a vacuum. The Nazis did not invent antisemitism, eugenics, or notions of racial supremacy. The Holocaust was the culmination of millennia of antisemitic hate. Throughout history, the hatred that begins by declaring: "You have no right to live among us" sooner or later says: "You have no right to live."

Excellencies,

The painful truth is: antisemitism is everywhere. In fact, it is increasing in intensity.

Over the last year, Orthodox Jews were assaulted on busy streets in Midtown Manhattan, Jewish schoolkids bullied in Melbourne, hateful banners hung on a freeway bridge in Los Angeles, and Swastikas spraypainted on the Holocaust memorial in Berlin.

Survey after survey arrives at the same conclusion: antisemitism is at record-highs. And what is true for antisemitism is true for other forms of hate: Racism. Anti-Muslim bigotry. Xenophobia. Homophobia. Misogyny. Neo-Nazi, white supremacist movements are becoming more dangerous by the day.

In fact, they now represent the number one internal security threat in several countries - and the fastest growing.

From Christchurch to Buffalo, from El Paso to Oslo, with targets from mosques to synagogues, refugee centers to grocery stores:

We are not just facing violent extremism; we are increasingly facing terrorism. The threat is global - and it is growing. And a leading accelerant of

his growth is the online world.

Today, I am issuing an urgent appeal to everyone with influence across the information ecosystem - regulators, policymakers, technology companies, the media, civil society, and governments. Stop the hate.

Set up guardrails. And enforce them.

Many parts of the Internet are becoming toxic waste dumps for hate and vicious lies. They are profit-driven catalysts for moving extremism from the margins to the mainstream.

By using algorithms that amplify hate to keep users glued to their screens, social media platforms are complicit. And so are the advertisers subsidising this business model.

That is why I have called for regulation that clarifies responsibility and improves transparency.

We know how easily hate speech turns to hate crime, how verbal violence breeds physical violence, how diversity and social cohesion are undermined - as are the values and principles that bind us together.

That is why I launched the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech. To provide a framework for our support to Member States to counter this scourge while respecting freedom of expression and opinion.

As part of Our Common Agenda, I have proposed a Global Digital Compact for an open, free, inclusive, and secure digital future for all, firmly anchored in human rights.

I have also called for a code of conduct to promote integrity in public information - so people can make choices based on fact, not fiction.

We all have a role to play. We can never let hate have the last word. We cannot allow old hatreds to find new outlets and impunity on digital platforms.

Together, we must confront falsehoods with facts, ignorance with education, indifference with engagement.

Because "never again" means telling the story again and again.

Excellencies,

We must tell the stories of the persecuted.

The mass murder of the Roma and Sinti.

The torture and murder of other victims targeted by the Nazis: persons with disabilities. Germans of African descent. Homosexuals. Soviet prisoners of war. Political dissenters and countless others.

And above all, we must tell the stories of all the children, women, and men who were systematically murdered and who together made up the rich and vibrant mosaic that was Jewish life in Europe.

We must remember the Holocaust not as the history of 6 million deaths; but as 6 million different stories of death.

We remember people like Janusz Korczak, the Polish doctor, educator and head of an orphanage in Warsaw. He refused offers to escape the Warsaw Ghetto and stayed with the 200 children under his care - all the way to Treblinka, so they would not die alone.

We remember Friedl Dicker Brandeis who taught art to children in the Theresienstadt Ghetto - encouraging them to paint or draw so that, if only for a moment, they might feel safe. In 1944, Friedl and her students were murdered in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

Today, as we remember them and countless, nameless others, we also reflect on our responsibility:

Our responsibility to honor the memory of those who perished; To learn the truth of what happened, and to ensure that neither we, nor future generations, ever forget; To refuse impunity for perpetrators anywhere; To stand against those who deny, distort, relativize, revise, or otherwise whitewash their own complicities or that of their parents or grandparents with regards to the Holocaust.

And our responsibility to intensify our efforts in prevention - to discredit prejudice, to resolve conflicts and settle disputes before they erupt.

Today and every day, let us recommit to stand against evil in all its forms and work for a world of peace, human rights, and dignity for all.

Thank you.