

Bigotry 'moving at lightning speed' Guterres warns, as UN marks the Holocaust

Amid an “alarming increase” in anti-Semitism, International [Holocaust Remembrance Day](#) was commemorated at UN Headquarters in New York on Monday, honouring the memory of some six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust during World War Two, along with many other victims of what the UN chief called “unprecedented, calculated cruelty and horror”.

“From a deadly assault on a synagogue in the United States to the desecration of Jewish cemeteries in Europe, this centuries-old hatred is not only still strong – it is getting worse” Secretary-General António Guterres said in his commemoration message, pointing to “the proliferation of neo-Nazi groups, and attempts to rewrite history and distort the facts of the Holocaust”.

As the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps recede in time, leaving fewer and fewer Holocaust survivors, the need to be vigilant grows stronger.

Under this year’s [theme](#): “Holocaust Remembrance: Demand and Defend Your Human Rights”, youth are being encouraged to learn valuable lessons from the Holocaust, such as acting forcefully against discrimination and defending essential democratic values.

“Now more than ever, let us unite in the fight for universal values and build a world of equality for all – *UN Secretary-General*

With neo-Nazism and hate groups on the rise, together with other forms of hatred around the world, the theme also highlights the 70th anniversary of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and the [Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#).

Mr. Guterres recalled the quote by former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, Jonathan Sacks: “The hate that begins with Jews never ends with Jews”.

“We see bigotry moving at lightning speed across the Internet”, underscored the UN chief, pointing to “intolerance entering mainstream politics – targeting minorities, Muslims, migrants and refugees, and exploiting the anger and anxiety of a changing world”.

“Now more than ever, let us unite in the fight for universal values and build a world of equality for all” concluded the Secretary-General.

For her part, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights [Michelle Bachelet](#) highlighted in a message to mark the day, that alongside millions of Jews, “the victims of the Nazi camps included hundreds of thousands of Roma and

Sinti people, people with disabilities, homosexuals, prisoners of war, political dissidents and members of Resistance networks from all over occupied Europe.”

Saying that “humanity could never again be the same after this frightful crime”, she spelled out: “We must stand together against this normalization of hatred. We must push back against this slowly rising tide of anti-Semitism, xenophobia and other attempts to deprive specific categories of people of their humanity and rights”.

As part of a week of commemorative activities, a ceremony on Monday in the General Assembly Hall featured first-hand testimony from survivors, memorial prayers, musical elements and words from Sara J. Bloomfield, Director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, who after 18 years, continues working to raise Holocaust awareness, deepen the understanding of its hard-learned lessons, confront denial and advance genocide prevention.

From the Hall, Mr. Guterres drew attention to what he called “the worst anti-Semitic attack in the history of the United States, when 11 worshippers observing Shabbat in Pittsburgh were murdered at the Tree of Life synagogue last October. “We must rise up against rising anti-Semitism”, he stressed.

In other events, an exhibition called “Beyond Duty: Diplomats Recognized as Righteous Among the Nations”, shared the unique stories of the diplomats who, serving under Nazi regimes, saved Jewish lives by providing passports, visas and travel permits for their escape.

“Only through multilateral action and cooperation can we move closer to achieving a world of safety and dignity for all people, everywhere”, Mr. Guterres said at the launch.

A presentation on a lesser-known chapter from Holocaust’s history about the haven some Jewish refugees fleeing Europe found in India was scheduled as part of the day’s events, and a second exhibition of photographs called “Bracha. A Blessing. Back to Polish Shtetls”, was unveiled, documenting the journeys taken by Jewish descendants from Poland, back to their birthplaces, to pay homage to the culture and heritage they were forced to leave behind in the form synagogues, graveyards and the graves of Tzadikim, or “the righteous people”.

For a full list of events, please click [here](#) and for some useful historical background, go [here](#).