

Human rights community mourns passing of Sir Nigel Rodley, former UN rights expert

27 January 2017 – Expressing sadness at the passing of noted rights icon, Sir Nigel Rodley, the United Nations human rights wing today recalled the contributions of one of the “best known public faces, and most eloquent voices” of the UN Human Rights Committee.

Affectionately known to the human rights community as ‘Sir Nigel,’ the rights expert passed away on 25 January, at the age of 75.

“He would speak directly and frankly to anyone, even the most powerful; yet would also treat everyone with great humanity and kindness,” Rupert Colville, the spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), told the regular bi-weekly media briefing in Geneva.

In addition to serving at the Human Rights Committee – the independent expert body that monitors worldwide implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – for 16 years between 2001 and 2016, Sir Nigel was a former UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment from 1993 to 2001, a devoted human rights defender and also an academic.

“For us at the UN Human Rights Office, he was someone who was always willing to pass on his knowledge and experience to a younger generation,” said Mr. Colville.

Sir Nigel was also the Professor of Law and Chair of the Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex in the United Kingdom. Many of his students are now working at OHCHR as well as at various other human rights institutions around the world.

Quoting OHCHR staff, he added: “Sir Nigel could be sharp, and he certainly pointed out your mistakes, but he was also generous with his praise.”

AUDIO: OHCHR spokesperson Rupert Colville speaking on what made Sir Nigel so special.

With 2.2 million Afghans feared to be

on the move, UN agency to begin tracking displacements, aid relief

27 January 2017 – Amid concerns of a severe humanitarian crisis induced by sudden return home of hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees and undocumented citizens, coupled with conflict-induced displacement, the United Nations migration agency has launched a new displacement tracking system to better understand population movements and needs in the crisis-struck country.

“There is an urgent need to know where people in vulnerable situations are living and what their needs are,” said the head of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) operations in Afghanistan, Laurence Hart.

In a news release issued earlier today, he added: “With a system in place to clearly track these concerns, humanitarian actors and the Government can deliver assistance and services to the families and communities that need it most.”

The UN agency hopes that with the launch of its Displacement Tracking Matrix – a system that employs a range of tools and processes to track and monitor population movement during crises – humanitarian actors will have a better understanding of the movements and evolving needs of vulnerable populations, whether on site or en route, and be alerted to urgent concerns, greatly facilitating humanitarian response.

According to IOM, in 2016, more than 600,000 registered refugees and undocumented Afghans returned back from Pakistan and, based on estimates, a further 1 million are expected to return in 2017.

On top of the returning population, last year also saw conflict-induced displacement of over 623,000, and an additional 450,000 people are expected to become internally displaced due to the ongoing conflict this year.



Children from an Afghan returnee family at their home in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. Photo: IOM (file)

Additional strain on overstretched services

There are particular concerns that such large-scale returns and intensified conflict, combined with rapid urbanization, have created additional strain on already overstretched local services. Further compounding the issue is the lack of accurate information on the location and needs of people who have returned or those who have been forced to leave their homes.

The first phase of the Displacement Tracking Matrix in Afghanistan will put a framework in place to track at risk populations in Nangarhar, Laghman and

Kunar provinces.

IOM said that its staff in these provinces will consult with community leaders and elders, national and local authorities, as well as previous registrations and assessments. They will also conduct field visits to get a comprehensive picture of the estimated number of returnees from abroad, internal movements and needs and conditions at the village, district and provincial levels.

“While there is good tracking along the borders, there is little knowledge of the actual final destinations, the villages and neighbourhoods, where people are arriving,” said IOM Human Mobility Tracking Expert Vlatko Avramovski. “The Matrix will deliver this information regularly and accurately.”

[UN health agency stepping up efforts to provide trauma care to people in Mosul](#)

27 January 2017 – As the conflict in Mosul intensifies and greater numbers of civilians are caught in the crossfire, the United Nations health agency and its partners have increased trauma care services to ensure that patients requiring medical care for injuries have a greater chance of survival.

“WHO [The World Health Organization] remains committed to supporting the ongoing response provided by the Ministry of Health and other health partners,” said Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, in a news release Wednesday. “However, additional funds are needed to provide the full scale of health services to the 2.7 million people affected by the Mosul operation.”

To fully support the health needs resulting from the Mosul operation, WHO requires a total of \$65 million of which \$14 million, or 21 per cent, has been received.

Many hospitals in Mosul have suffered extensive damage and are no longer able to provide health services.

Trauma casualty rates remain high near frontline areas, with many trauma cases requiring referral from Mosul to Erbil in northern Iraq.

Three field hospitals, with a capacity of 40–50 beds, will soon be established to support access to trauma care to the west and south of Mosul. These hospitals will fill a critical gap, as trauma patients are currently transported to referral hospitals in Erbil, a one- to two-hour drive away. From 17 October 2016 to 18 January 2017, 1610 wounded civilians were sent to

Erbil's two main hospitals.

Honouring Holocaust victims, UN chief Guterres pledges to battle anti-Semitism, all forms of hatred

27 January 2017 – The world has a duty to remember that the Holocaust was a systematic attempt to eliminate the Jewish people and so many others, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said today, noting that building a future of dignity and equality for all will honour the victims of this “incomparable tragedy in human history [...] who we will never allow to be forgotten.”

Marking the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, Mr. Guterres said in video message that it would be a dangerous error to think of the Holocaust as simply the result of the insanity of a group of criminal Nazis.

“On the contrary, the Holocaust was the culmination of millennia of hatred, scapegoating and discrimination targeting the Jews, what we now call anti-Semitism,” he emphasized, adding that tragically and contrary to the international community’s resolve, anti-Semitism continues to thrive.

Moreover, the world is also witnessing a “deeply troubling” rise in extremism, xenophobia, racism and anti-Muslim hatred. “Irrationality and intolerance are back,” said the UN chief.

Stressing that this is in complete contrast to the universal values enshrined in the UN Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, he said: “We can never remain silent or indifferent when human beings are suffering. We must always defend the vulnerable and bring tormentors to justice. And as the theme of this year’s observance highlights, a better future depends on education.”

“After the horrors of the 20th century, there should be no room for intolerance in the 21st. I guarantee you that as Secretary-General of the United Nations, I will be in the frontline of the battle against anti-Semitism and all other forms of hatred,” said Mr. Guterres.

Also today, in his remarks, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said the day of remembrance for the victims of the Nazi Holocaust forces the world to contemplate the horrors to which bigotry, racism and discrimination ultimately lead.

“The sadistic brutality of the atrocities inflicted by the Nazi regime

on Jews, Roma, Slavs, persons with disabilities, political dissidents, homosexuals and others was nourished by layer upon layer of propaganda, falsifications and incitement to hatred,” he said, adding that they were denigrated and smeared; one after another, their rights were refused, and finally, even their humanity was denied.

“'It happened, therefore it can happen again,' wrote Primo Levi, who endured and survived the concentration camp at Auschwitz Birkenau. As we honour the victims of the Holocaust, we must also acknowledge the need to prevent the recurrence of anti-Semitism and all forms of racial and religious hatred and discrimination today,” the UN rights chief stated.

It is therefore essential to uphold independent rule of law institutions and a free press, which can hold leaders to account and establish a truthful record of the facts. It is crucial to maintain respect for human rights, especially in respect of the right to life and wellbeing of all people regardless of their origin or ethnicity.

“Above all, education must be at the core of all efforts to combat anti-Semitism, racism, and all forms of discrimination. Although an important part of that work must be centred on schools and other academic fora, education in this sense must extend far more broadly, so that we can undo the stereotypes which generate so much injustice and prejudice throughout society,” stressed Mr. Zeid.

A Holocaust Memorial Ceremony is taking place today at UN Headquarters in New York, hosted by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, Cristina Gallach. Speakers are expected to include Peter Thomson, President of the UN General Assembly; Danny Danon, Permanent Representative of Israel to the UN; and Michele J. Sison, United States Deputy Representative to the UN.

Noah Klieger, a 90-year old Holocaust survivor, will be keynote speaker. Cantor Israel Singer, of Congregation Temple Emanu-El of Closter, New Jersey, will recite the memorial prayers and be accompanied by violinist Artur Kaganovskiy. The ceremony will include music by guitarist Gary Lucas and vocalist Rachel Joselson, Doctor of Music Arts and Associate Professor at the University of Iowa.

[FEATURE: Story of Japan's 'Schindler' offers lessons for tackling contemporary xenophobia](#)

26 January 2017 – During World War II, Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese diplomat posted as an acting consul in Lithuania, disobeyed instructions from his own

Government and issued visas for Jews fleeing Nazi persecution.

Sugihara issued more than 2,000 transit visas to Jewish refugees in 1940, continuing to sign the travel documents even after the Japanese consulate was closed down and until his train pulled away from the station. Many of the visas were for entire families. As a result, it is estimated that Sugihara saved 6,000 Jews.

Sugihara came to be known as Japan's Schindler after Oskar Schindler, a German industrialist who hired about 1,200 Jews to work at his factories during the Holocaust, thus saving their lives.

My father was No. 299 on the list and my uncle was No. 27

Ahead of the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, observed annually on 27 January, dozens of descendants of the so-called "Sugihara" survivors attended yesterday's screening of a film that depicts his humanitarian acts – one of the many Holocaust remembrance events being held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York this week.

"My father was No. 299 on the list and my uncle was No. 27," Richard A. Salomon told *UN News*, stressing that without Sugihara's act of kindness and righteousness, "they would have died and perished at the hands of the Nazis."



Sugihara's family at the Japanese consulate in East Prussia, Germany.
Photo/NPO Chiune Sugihara Visas For Life

The journey allowed them passage through Japan to Shanghai, China, and from there to India and ultimately to the United States.

"Sugihara gave an ultimate gift – gift of life – to my family and so many others. We need to continue to keep that memory alive," Mr. Salomon said, adding that he has co-founded a Holocaust museum in Illinois, which has the largest collection of Sugihara memorabilia in the United States.

The 2017 theme for the Holocaust remembrance and education activities undertaken by the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme – a programme established under a resolution in 2005 of the UN General Assembly – is "Holocaust Remembrance: Educating for a Better Future."

"The main message is simple. Any person can make a difference. One person can make a huge difference," Cellin Gluck, Director of *Persona Non Grata*, told *UN News*.

History repeats itself and we should try to learn from our past.
But we have a tendency to forget what we've learned

Noting that Sugihara's action resulted in the saving of the lives of more than 6,000 people, Mr. Gluck said "now more than 75 years later, it's not just those 6,000 people who came out." Those 6,000 Jews have now an estimated 40,000 to 100,000 descendants. "You can see how one person's action can make a huge difference," he said.

"History repeats itself and we should try to learn from our past. But we have a tendency to forget what we've learned," Mr. Gluck warned, noting that his film is "synchronistically, very contemporary" because the world is facing a similar problem again, perhaps not exactly the same way, but in the forms of discrimination against refugees and of groups ostracized. "We cannot allow it to repeat itself," he emphasized.

VIDEO: Movie Director Cellin Gluck describes to UN News how his film, which explains how Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara saved the lives of thousands of Jews, can teach us not to repeat the mistakes of the past. *Credit: UN News*

As a result of issuing visas for Jewish refugees, Sugihara became a "persona non grata" (a Latin expression for unwanted person) to his own Government, which has since recognized his heroism.

Speaking before the film screening, UN Under-Secretary-General for Communication and Public Information Cristina Gallach told the audience that "by telling personal stories of the Holocaust, films can help remind us all of the dangers of extremism and its impact on our fellow human beings."

UN Department of Public Information has embarked on a number of activities, including special events, film screenings, discussion papers from leading academics, information materials, partnerships with intergovernmental organizations and other initiatives, to encourage awareness and remind the world of the threat posed to us all when genocide and crimes against humanity are allowed to occur.