

'Humiliation was the worst'; Holocaust survivor asks the world to act with 'empathy and compassion'

More than seven decades ago in Auschwitz, Jewish teenager Marian Turski felt he "had no name, he had nothing, but a number" tattooed on his body. Speaking on Monday, at the [annual Holocaust Memorial Ceremony](#), at United Nations Headquarters in New York, the 92-year-old called on the world to express renewed "empathy and compassion".

Sharing his extraordinary story, he said that the worst part of surviving the Nazi death camps was not the extreme hunger, the coldness or the deteriorating living conditions, but "the humiliation, just because you were Jewish, you were treated not like a human being, you were treated like a louse, a bed bug, like a cockroach", he told those who had gathered to commemorate.

Mentioning conflicts going on now in Ukraine, Sudan and Yemen, Mr. Turski said that when it came to giving advice today, "the most important words are: empathy and compassion". He highlighted the importance of "protecting our children" from all catastrophes.

His story followed testimony from Inge Auerbacher, who was liberated from a different camp, on the same day as Mr. Turski. She described how in the concentration camps "life was especially hard for children, for whom the most important words in their vocabulary were potatoes, bread and soup."

Inge was born in Germany and spent three years between seven and 10 years of age in the Terezin (Theresienstadt) concentration camp in Czechoslovakia, where only around one per cent of its 15,000 children, survived.

Lamenting the rising wave of anti-Semitism today, Ms. Auerbacher pleaded for everyone across the world to "make good choices".

"My hope, wish, and prayer, is for every child to live in peace without hunger and prejudice. The antidote to hatred is education, no more genocides, no more anti-Semitism", she added.

Ms. Auerbacher also wrote the words to the song "Who am I", which was performed during the UN Holocaust Remembrance ceremony by the PS22 elementary school Chorus of Staten Island, New York.



UN Photo/Loey Felipe

Sara J. Bloomfield, Director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, delivers her keynote speech during the annual United Nations Holocaust Remembrance Ceremony.

The role of education and history was emphasized by Sara Bloomfield, Director of the powerful United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, in Washington DC, who added that “after 2000 years of various forms of anti-Semitism, it doesn’t seem to be an eradicable disease, nor does hate”.

Drawing parallels between the horror of the Holocaust, and the present, Ms. Bloomfield added that it’s essential to “look back, to remember the victims lives and to remember that we failed them. We can’t fail them again by forgetting, by ignoring anti-Semitism and by not learning from our failures”, she concluded.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Day is marked each 27 January, when the notorious Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp was liberated by Allied troops, 74 years ago, in the final months of the World War Two.