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联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Message from  
Ms Irina Bokova,  
Director-General of UNESCO,**

**on the occasion of International Day of Commemoration  
in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust**

**27 January 2015**

Seventy years ago to the day, Red Army troops discovered the Auschwitz-Birkenau German Nazi concentration and extermination camp, where they released thousands of exhausted prisoners. Some 1,100,000 people had already died, including nearly a million Jews, as well as Poles, Gypsies, Soviet prisoners of war and other prisoners and deportees from all over Europe.

In the name of a racist ideology, the central element of which was hatred of Jews, millions of people of all ages and all conditions were murdered on a continental scale. Auschwitz-Birkenau was, along with Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor and Treblinka, at the heart of this industrial killing, which cost the lives of nearly six million Jews. This collapse in values and human rights is not the history of just one people or one region: it is our common history. Transmission of this history sheds light on the mechanisms of exclusion and violence that we find, in various forms, in certain regions of the world today. It reminds us that fanaticism targets both the physical destruction of people and the obliteration of their culture and heritage. It forces us to open our eyes to the reality of anti-Semitism today and to fight it relentlessly.

UNESCO was founded 70 years ago, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, precisely in order to prevent the return of the criminal madness of the Nazis and their collaborators, by using the resources of education and culture, by strengthening the intellectual and moral solidarity of peoples, as guarantees for the equality and dignity of all women and men. This International Day shines the spotlight on the

core principles that underpin all of our action and the absolute need to enforce them today.

Education on the history of the Holocaust is a vital part of this struggle, which requires total commitment from teachers, the media and all social actors. It must help us to prevent future genocides. It must enable young people to protect themselves from hate speech, racism and anti-Semitism and to not be misled by the many guises they take today. This work involves responding, point by point, to those who deny the Holocaust or relativize the crimes committed against the Jews, who seek to justify and perpetuate the hate that caused the genocide.

Seventy years after Auschwitz, this struggle continues to this day, because racism and anti-Semitism, based on ignorance and prejudice, continue to kill men and women. The survivors we honour this year convey to us a message of vigilance, which we must hear and put into action. In the name of this shared heritage, I call upon all Member States to teach the history of the Holocaust in schools and to make the prevention of genocide and mass crimes an educational priority. In the fight against fanaticism that killed in the past and continues to kill today, I call on all to reaffirm, more than ever, UNESCO's founding credo: "*Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed*".

Irina Bokova