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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

“Anti-Semitic propaganda and the Holocaust: from words to genocide”

27 January 2016

The genocide of the Jews of Europe perpetrated by the Nazis and their collaborators confronts us with the most extreme perversion: the negation of humanity in the human being. Millions of other people, on account of their supposed racial inferiority, their ideas, or on other grounds, were persecuted and killed by the Nazis.

Commemorating the victims is a common duty of humankind.

It is a call to “remember together” and to share this universal memory, regardless of origin or religion.

It is also the desire to understand the historical and social processes that unleashed such an outbreak of violence, in order to prevent them from recurring today.

The Nazis relied on the most advanced communication technologies of their time to plant their racist and anti-Semitic ideology in people’s minds. Their quest for power and their control over all means of information and propaganda allowed them to legitimize their radical plans for domination based on the hierarchy of human “races” and the denial of the unity of humankind. The history of the Holocaust reminds us that there are words that can kill and that in each mass killing, premonitory signs precede the tragedy and rhetoric becomes increasingly hateful as it remains unanswered. Seventy years later, in the era of the Internet and social media, the power of propaganda is more devastating than ever. We can clearly see

it at work today in the Middle East and in other regions of the world, where extremist groups use and abuse the Internet and other means of communication to spread their criminal ideology and lead campaigns of terror against civilian populations and religious or cultural minorities. They stage their crimes and destruction to spread hatred throughout the world.

However, we can answer the words that wound and kill with intelligence and the voice of reason. Let us dare to stand against racism and anti-Semitism. Let us never allow propaganda and the falsification of history to go unchallenged. Let us not accept any of the false truths that feed Holocaust denial. Education on the history of the Holocaust must serve us as an antidote. It can help us to notice the harbingers of radical violence. It can also help us to recognize and denounce anti-Semitism in all its guises, even when it is insidious, in conspiracy theories or the hateful and systematic criticism of Israel.

This spirit of remembrance, prevention and vigilance guides UNESCO in its Holocaust and genocide education programme, unique within the United Nations, through teacher training and the renewal of teaching methods, curricula and textbooks. Today, I call upon all Member States to participate in the effort to make this chapter of history better known in schools and media everywhere, as widely as possible. The exercise is complex, because studying genocide and its processes confronts us with the worst of humanity. It also enables us to discover the courage and foresight of those who were able to see the approaching storm and resist barbarity. In tribute to those men and women, and in memory of the victims, let us become the actors of active remembrance; remembrance that is turned towards the future and committed to the dignity of each and every human being, as a foundation for peace.

Irina Bokova