

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein
statement ahead of the International Day of Commemoration in
Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust

27 January 2015, Geneva

Seventy years ago on this forever solemn day, Auschwitz-Birkenau – the largest killing centre of the Nazi concentration camps – was finally liberated.

We continue to be haunted by the fate of the millions of Jewish men, women and children, as well as Roma, Poles, Soviet prisoners of war and other prisoners and deportees from all over Europe, people with disabilities, homosexuals, and dissidents, who suffered and were killed by this ghastly extermination machine. The memory of well over a million Jewish children, and thousands of other children, who were put to death is particularly unbearable. Both personally and as a representative of the United Nations, I bow to every woman, man and child who was forced to endure such terrible suffering.

The Charter of the United Nations – which also commemorates its 70th anniversary this year – was shaped in response to the atrocities of the Holocaust and the Second World War. The Charter seeks to establish a new "vision of what the world should be". It should be a world in which all people are able to exercise their human rights in freedom, dignity and equality, in full accordance with international human rights law.

And yet the toxic influences of discrimination and racial and ethnic hatred can still be felt among us, and the catalogue of atrocities runs on and on. Discrimination and hatred kill and wound thousands of people. They also harm each one of us. They negate the wonderful diversity of individuals and cultures within our shared membership of humanity, and our fundamental and universal human rights. In memory of the victims and survivors of the Holocaust, and the pain that many others have since endured, I believe that it is urgent for us all to strengthen our moral courage. We must resist discrimination of every kind so that all may live in liberty, with respect, equality and justice.

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