



United Nations Marks 60th Anniversary of Liberation of Nazi Death Camps

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New York, January 24, 2005 (United Nations News Service) - With everlasting regret for the past and "never again" resolve for the future, the United Nations today [commemorated](#) the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camps, symbol of the Holocaust that slaughtered at least 6 million Jews and others in World War II.

"It is, above all, a day to remember not only the victims of past horrors, whom the world abandoned, but also the potential victims of present and future ones," Secretary-General Kofi Annan [told](#) the 191-member General Assembly during its first-ever special commemorative session, noting that the United Nations itself was born out of the ashes of the Holocaust.

"Such an evil must never be allowed to happen again. We must be on the watch for any revival of anti-Semitism and ready to act against the new forms of it that are appearing today," he added, paying homage, too, to other groups slaughtered by Nazi Germany, including the Roma people, Slavs, Soviet prisoners of war, the handicapped, Jehovah's Witnesses and homosexuals.

"But the tragedy of the Jewish people was unique," he stressed. "An entire civilization, which had contributed far beyond its numbers to the cultural and intellectual riches of Europe and the world, was uprooted, destroyed, laid waste."

Turning to more recent cases of genocide in Cambodia, Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, Mr. Annan declared: "On occasions such as this, rhetoric comes easily. We rightly say 'never again.' But action is much harder. Since the Holocaust the world has, to its shame, failed more than once to prevent or halt genocide."

He noted that even today "terrible things" are happening in Darfur, Sudan, where tens of thousands of people have died and nearly 2 million have been uprooted in fighting between the Government, pro-government militias and rebels. Tomorrow, he expected to receive an international report determining whether this constitutes genocide.

The commemoration comes three days before the actual anniversary of the liberation by Soviet troops on 27 January 1945 of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp which, with its gas ovens and crematoria, came to epitomize more than any other the horror.

Before the day-long session, which began with one minute of silence, Mr. Annan and his wife, Nane, hosted a coffee reception for death camp survivors and other distinguished guests, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel.

Among the host of speakers at the session from all regions of the world were the Foreign Ministers of Israel and Germany, heirs to the two sides of the Holocaust.

The General Assembly President, Foreign Minister Jean Ping of Gabon, said the session was

symbolic because, through it, the international community could finally, together, "exorcise the tragedy of the Holocaust and, by so doing, express its firm will to condemn to eternal failure tyranny and barbaric behaviour wherever that was displayed."

Brian Urquhart, a former UN Under-Secretary-General who was among the first Allied troops to reach the Bergen-Belsen death camp, told the session the inhuman conditions of the starving, broken and traumatized prisoners had to be seen to be believed. "The dead and dying were everywhere," he said. "Who could imagine such horrors?" Like many other speakers, he raised the rallying cry of "never again."

Mr. Wiesel said Auschwitz was "an executioner's ideal of a kingdom of absolute evil and malediction." But he looked to the present and future, too, calling for the trial and punishment of those who today preach and practice the cult of death and use suicide terrorism. "The past is in the present, but the future is still in our hands," he declared.

For his part, Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said it was not too late to work for an international community that is uncompromising in combating intolerance against people of all faiths and ethnicities. "Let all of us gathered here pledge never to forget the victims, never to abandon the survivors, and never to allow such an event ever to be repeated," he urged.

German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer said the UN was ideally suited for genocide prevention since no other organization had so much experience in conflict prevention and the promotion and protection of human rights. "Precisely because genocide never happens entirely without warning, we have to work on combating its harbingers," he declared.

Alpha Ibrahima Stued, a Special Envoy of Guinea and speaking on behalf of African States, said the extermination of 6 million Jews during the Holocaust would continue to weigh heavily on the conscience of mankind. The African Group hoped that the special session would serve as a framework for more intensive thinking on ways to draw lessons from the Holocaust, as well as to address genocide, human rights abuses and racial discrimination.

Ambassador Ravan AG Farhadi of Afghanistan, speaking on behalf of the Asian Group, said while the General Assembly was commemorating the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps, it was high time, based on the lessons learned from that tragedy, to emphasize the central role of the United Nations in ensuring a system of genuine global security and promoting human rights and general human progress, in the face of the new threats and challenges.

Speaking on behalf of the Eastern European Group, Ambassador Stefan Tafrov of Bulgaria said the Holocaust was a vivid example of the fact that when one minority was persecuted all minorities were threatened, and when all minorities were threatened everybody was threatened. Remembering that political and, above all, moral catastrophe of the past was the best way to fight the evils of the present, he added.

Ambassador Manuel Acosta Bonilla of Honduras, speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean States, said it was important to ensure that genocide and other crimes against humanity and international humanitarian law must be confronted with comprehensive and powerful global legal measures. To that end, the creation of an international legal system and the fact that the International Criminal Court (ICC) had been established had been important steps towards achieving that goal. "We cannot leave such tragic and dark legacies to our children," he said.

Portuguese Ambassador João Salgueiro, speaking on behalf of the Western European and Other States Group, called on the Assembly to once again renew the vows of its foundation, "in particular to reaffirm our faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of all men and women and of all nations large and small."

After the session, Mr. Annan and Mr. Shalom were to formally open an exhibition entitled "Auschwitz - the Depth of the Abyss" in the northeast gallery of the General Assembly Visitors' Lobby.

The exhibit is comprised of two parts: the Auschwitz Album, consisting of the only surviving visual evidence of mass murder at Auschwitz-Birkenau from photos taken in May or June 1944 by an SS man of the selection process in which the fit were sent to work and the rest to the gas chambers; and Private Tolkatchev at Gates of Hell, the paintings by Ukrainian artist Zinovii Tolkatchev of the horrors of Majdanek extermination camp.
