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Organización
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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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 2017

The date 27 January commemorates the day in 1945 that the Soviet army discovered the horror of the Nazi German concentration and extermination camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Over 1.1 million people were murdered in this vast killing machine, almost one million of them Jewish. Nazi Germany also persecuted and slaughtered millions of other people for their race, politics or sexual orientation. The site of Auschwitz-Birkenau, included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1979, is a symbol of “man’s inhumanity to man”, and the enduring proof of crimes committed out of racist and anti-Semitic hatred.

Anti-Semitism can change its face, from religious to social, racial and political, but is still the same hatred that wounds and kills. That is why remembering the crimes of the Nazi regime and its collaborators must be an active memory, so that we can understand the mechanisms of exclusion, recognize where violence leads when it is met with indifference, denial or oblivion, and prevent mass crimes from happening again. History also gives us a better grasp of the specific nature of this hatred here and now, including when it hides behind the hateful and systematic criticism of Israel. The fight against all forms of anti-Semitism, racism and intolerance is the foundation of respect for the rights of all.

That human beings were deemed “superfluous” and killed because they were born Jewish is a universal crime that touches all of humanity, beyond differences of religion, opinion or origin. In the violence unleashed today on civilian populations in many parts of the world, in the hate speech prevalent on social media, it is not hard to detect the echo of these totalitarian ideologies.

In response, UNESCO is convinced of the power of knowledge, information and education to act as a bulwark against anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial and all forms of racism. The better we know our own history and that of others, the stronger the bonds we forge with humanity. The transmission of history encourages solidarity and shapes a humanity that is more united, fairer and more peaceful. In this respect, heritage sites, museums, documents and the vestiges of the past play a crucial role in education, and can help all citizens, of any age, to denounce the falsehoods and lies of those who would exploit ignorance, fear and hatred of the other. UNESCO commits itself every day to teaching the history of the Holocaust and other genocides, alongside students, teachers and education policy-makers in every region of the world. This aspiration to global citizenship lies at the heart of the United Nations' work, and I call once more on Member States to include the history of the Holocaust and other genocides and crimes against humanity in their curricula, as an introduction to tolerance and peace.

Irina Bokova