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GENERAL ASSEMBLY DECIDES TO DESIGNATE 27 JANUARY AS ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL DAY OF COMMEMORATION TO HONOUR HOLOCAUST VICTIMS

The General Assembly today decided that the United Nations will designate 27 January -- the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp -- as an annual International Day of Commemoration to honour the victims of the Holocaust, and urged Member States to develop educational programmes to instil the memory of the tragedy in future generations to prevent genocide from occurring again.

Rejecting any denial of the Holocaust as a historical event, either in full or in part, the 191-member Assembly adopted by consensus a resolution condemning "without reserve" all manifestations of religious intolerance, incitement, harassment or violence against persons or communities based on ethnic origin or religious belief, whenever they occur.

The Assembly also requested United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan to establish an outreach programme on the "Holocaust and the United Nations", as well as measures to mobilize civil society for Holocaust remembrance and education, in order to help prevent future acts of genocide.

The debate on the issue stretched over two days, with delegations expressing support for the historic text, which honoured the "courage and dedication shown by soldiers who liberated the concentration camps", and commended countries that had worked hard to preserve those sites which served as Nazi death camps or forced labour prisons during the Holocaust.

Introducing his country's first-ever resolution before the Assembly, Israel's representative yesterday said it was imperative for the sanctity of life and for the preservation of humanity for all States to learn the lessons of the Holocaust, and to prevent such atrocities in the future. He urged the Assembly to adopt the text by consensus so that the United Nations and its Member States could demonstrate their commitment to the cause with one voice.

Today, Brazil's representative said the Jewish Holocaust had been a paradigm of genocide -- a crime that had not been defined until then and one not affording legal recourse before then. Massacres prior to that tragedy could not be properly judged, and their perpetrators could not be punished, including crimes committed against the indigenous peoples of the Americas during the colonial period, along with the practice of slavery, he said. The 1948 anti-genocide Convention was the starting point of the needed definition. Now the crime had been incorporated into the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Sixty years on, it was still difficult for the vast majority of Member States to examine their own national histories, particularly modern histories, said Jordan's representative. And if genocide was to be made a truly unthinkable occurrence in the future, not only must countries confront their own philosophies of negation, but they must also collectively support the Court, the only permanent judicial body designed to end impunity for the gravest of crimes.

While all speakers backed the general thrust of the draft, there were calls for its scope to be expanded beyond the specific events surrounding the Holocaust to incorporate not only the lessons of that tragedy, but also other war crimes, acts of genocide or ethnic cleansing, such as had been witnessed in the Balkans and Rwanda. Indonesia's representative was among those condemning the Holocaust, while stressing that history registered a long list of human tragedies. It would be preferable if the intention to institute Holocaust remembrance within the United Nations system also gave simultaneous attention to other tragedies, he said.

Wrapping up the discussion, Assembly President Jan Eliasson of Sweden said the Holocaust had been a turning point in history, which had prompted the world to say "never again". The significance of the resolution adopted today was that it called for a remembrance of past crimes with an eye towards preventing them in the future.

Also speaking today were the representatives of China, Guatemala, Republic of Korea, Belarus, Ukraine, Argentina and Austria, as well as the Observer for the Holy See.

Speaking after adoption of the text were the representatives of Venezuela, Egypt, Malaysia and Israel.

The representative of Japan spoke in exercise of the right of reply.

The Assembly will reconvene at 9:30 a.m. on Thursday, 3 November, to hold elections to fill vacancies in several United Nations bodies, and to jointly consider matters related to the implementation of United Nations resolutions, and sport for peace and development.

Background

The General Assembly met this morning to conclude its debate on Holocaust remembrance.

By the terms of a draft resolution on Holocaust remembrance (document A/60/L.12), the Assembly would call for the designation of 27 January as an annual International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust. It would also reject any denial of the Holocaust as a historical event, either in full or in part, and urge Member States to develop educational programmes that will inculcate future generations with the lessons of the Holocaust in order to help prevent future acts of genocide.

The programme budget implications of the draft resolution are contained in a report of the Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) (document A/60/528). It states that adoption of the resolution would entail the expenditure of additional resources in the amount of \$345,200, in the section related to Public Information, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007. That would represent a charge against the contingency fund and would require appropriation. The Committee thus requests the Secretary-General to report on actual expenditures incurred for the activity in the context of his second performance report on the 2006-2007 programme budget.

Statements

LIU ZHONGXIN (China) said the Second World War was an unprecedented event in human history because of the Nazi attempt to wipe out the entire Jewish nation step by step. The judgement of the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal had upheld international justice and safeguarded human dignity. Its nature of justice was unshakeable and unchallengeable.

The bitter lessons of the War and the tragedies in the Nazi concentration camps showed that the basic values of freedom, democracy, equality, justice and peace could not be denied. The Chinese delegation supported adding "Holocaust Remembrance" to the agenda of the current General Assembly session and adopting a resolution with the same title. The United Nations shouldered the responsibility to teach succeeding generations the profound lessons of the Holocaust, and to prevent the recurrence of such acts of genocide.

ZEID RA'AD ZEID AL-HUSSEIN (Jordan) said it was appropriate to have another discussion about

the Holocaust in the General Assembly because there should never be a cessation of relevant lessons drawn from that astonishing and terrifying period of human experience. The Holocaust was a different genocide; a genocide where wickedness fell into union with human organization. It was a crime of the most colossal proportions.

Sixty years on, it was still difficult for the vast majority of Member States to examine their own national histories, particularly modern histories, he said. It was high time that countries begin to reckon with what in their national memory was distasteful or was perhaps even criminal or terrible. "But to what purpose must we all draw on our memories generally, and, in this instance, the memories of others? First and foremost, we must of course remind ourselves the extent to which chauvinistic nationalisms or philosophies of negation can be pernicious."

The principal lesson drawn by 100 members of the General Assembly was that if genocide was to be made a truly unthinkable occurrence in the future, not only must countries confront philosophies of negation within their own societies, but they must also support collectively the permanent judicial body designed to end impunity for the gravest of crimes, the International Criminal Court. Unfortunately, and by contrast, "never again" was also sometimes used as a form of moral justification for the implementation of some policies, the effect of which was the continued domination of one people by another.

JORGE SKINNER-KLÉE (Guatemala) said the Holocaust was the most appalling horror suffered by humanity in the twentieth century, and it would forever burden the conscience of humanity and all nations. The solemn act of remembrance nations were engaged in was not only to alert future generations, but also to forge a new conscience among peoples for the purpose of ensuring that no such ignominious crime would ever recur or be the object of complicit silence.

There was a need, he said, for nations to now call into question some of their ancestral habits, and deal decidedly with the problems that separated peoples. Guatemala knew too well the horrors that intolerance created, enduring its own horrendous suffering inflicted by the violence that raged in the country due merely to the fact that some Guatemalans maintained contrarian views, or held divergent beliefs. Therefore, Guatemala supported the adoption of measures that sought to mobilize world society to prevent the future commission of any cruel, infamous or degrading act.

SHIN KAK-SOO (Republic of Korea) said that even today, the world was witness to many genocides and crimes against humanity, from Srebrenica to Kigali to Darfur. The international community was compelled to redouble its efforts towards realizing a reliable and effective security system. It was essential to quickly implement the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing when national authorities failed to do so. Serious efforts should be made to carry that process forward.

He said that any attempt to deny the Holocaust as a historical reality must be rejected. It took many survivors years to recover the strength to tell their stories. That had also been true for many of the Korean victims who suffered during the Second World War. Facing up to the truth about history and learning its lessons was not a choice but an obligation. For that reason, he strongly supported the draft resolution's recommendation to develop educational programmes to teach the lessons of the Holocaust to future generations. That education should consist of more than just a ritualized litany of horrors. It should be taught in a way that enabled future generations to understand how the Holocaust happened and prevent its recurrence.

ANDREI DAPKIUNAS (Belarus) said the ravages of the Holocaust had seared the souls of the people of Belarus. He asked himself why people did not look at the Holocaust as something close to themselves. And, why was it that despite the Holocaust, there continued to be ethnic cleansing? He felt the answer had to do with an understanding of human nature, and the fact that no one with a human heart could reconcile himself or herself to it.

It was necessary to decide which pages of human history could be turned over with a clear heart and which could not, he said. The page of the Holocaust could not be turned over until the lessons of that event had been fully learned. The lessons had to be learned jointly. The evil of the Holocaust was too strong for anyone to deal with alone. As long as there was a world of "them and us", the lessons would not be learned.

VALERIY KUCHINSKY (Ukraine) said the Holocaust was not only the pain of the Jewish people but of the entire world. His country remembered the perverse extermination camps and the deaths of scores of people, including hundreds of thousands from Ukraine. Many had thought that the horrors of the Holocaust could never happen again. But they had, in Cambodia, Srebrenica, Rwanda and, most recently, in Darfur. Therefore, it was necessary that the history of the Holocaust be understood so that it was not repeated again. The lessons of the Holocaust remained highly relevant and required the close attention of the United Nations.

He said the history of the Holocaust was taught in schools in Ukraine. His country hoped to establish a Ukrainian Museum of the Holocaust in Kiev soon. Ukraine was also taking steps to protect and ensure harmony between all of its ethnic groups. The great famine of 1931-1932 in Ukraine, deliberately created by the Soviet regime, led to the deaths of tens of millions of Ukrainians. Like the Holocaust, that tragedy still awaited wider international recognition. Two years ago, for the first time, the famine was recognized for the tragedy it was. Ukraine would continue to strive to bring the truth about the Holocaust and that famine, the Holodomor, to the world's attention.

RONALDO MOTA SARDENBERG (Brazil) said the Jewish Holocaust had been a paradigm of genocide, a crime that, until then, lacked definition and did not allow for legal recourse. The Hague Treaties had not mentioned genocide. Massacres prior to the Holocaust could not be properly judged, and their perpetrators could not be punished, including the crimes committed against the indigenous peoples of the Americas during the colonial period, along with the practice of slavery. The profound impact of the Holocaust prompted the international community to attempt, through the United Nations, to define genocide as an international crime and to bring its perpetrators to justice. In 1948, the United Nations approved the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and, more recently, the crime was incorporated into the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

He said the fight against the crime of genocide would only be complete when States adhered to and implemented human rights instruments in both the domestic and international spheres. In remembering the Holocaust, the international community not only renewed its indignation and rejection of the actions committed, but also renewed its commitment to fight oppression and prejudice wherever it took place.

Grave war crimes and crimes against humanity had continued to occur since the Holocaust, he concluded. They had occurred in Cambodia, the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, among others. They added to the sense of abhorrence and strengthened the resolve to prevent such crimes. By co-sponsoring the resolution, Brazil expressed absolute condemnation of the Holocaust, reaffirmed its reverence for the victims and manifested solidarity with the survivors of an unspeakable crime.

CESAR MAYORAL (Argentina) said remembrance was indispensable in a world that was overwhelmed by the need to resolve new problems, and where young people might think that the Holocaust was a historical event that occurred under specific political circumstances that no longer existed. No country could consider itself immune from a future wave of violence, fuelled by intolerance for economic, religious, political or racial reasons.

He said the Holocaust revealed great truths, which must not be forgotten, about the damage human beings could cause to one another. In spite of efforts to combat it, racist anti-Semitism periodically re-emerged in attacks on synagogues, profanation of cemeteries or the cynical speculations of supposed historians who made the events relative, or denied them. Irrationalities that derived from fanatic ideology, ignorance, denial or distrust were part of the darkest aspects of the human condition. In different conditions and places, they moved to other communities and groups, as they had in recent times. The world was in a crucial moment, facing new challenges and threats to a future of peace based upon the rights of peoples. The United Nations needed agile and powerful tools to protect human rights in an effective way under any circumstance and at any time.

GERHARD PFANZELTER (Austria) was pleased to be one of the co-sponsors of the draft resolution. The day of the liberation of Auschwitz was a day of global significance and a reminder to Austria of its dark past. "We feel the agony of knowing that our country lost so many of its Jewish citizens to the Holocaust. At the same time, we feel the pain of realizing that far too many Austrians took part in this greatest of all crimes."

He urged everyone to remember the words of Simon Wiesenthal's speech to the United Nations 10 years ago, telling everyone to teach young people about the horrors of hatred, intolerance, racism, and discrimination. Young people had to be taught that no country, no society, could achieve any progress without respect for every human being. That was the lesson of the Holocaust. The Day of Remembrance should serve to remind everyone of what was lost and what was destroyed. The common challenge was to foster more just and democratic societies, free of hatred.

CELESTINO MIGLIORE, Observer of the Holy See, said remembering was both a duty and a common responsibility, particularly with regard to the Holocaust. The horror of that crime had been before the world for 60 years and still, history had repeated itself. An international Convention on the subject had not prevented the kind of thinking that led to genocide, nor the violence that perpetrated it, nor the injustice that made it possible or the interests that allowed it to continue over the time. Genocides, atrocities, mass killings and ethnic cleansings since the Holocaust had not been confined to any one continent. In remembering the Holocaust, it was fitting to pledge all collective effort to make sure that, having named the crime, the world's nations would recognize its manifestations for what they were and would prevent it in the future.

The first step to preventing another Shoah had been the formulation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, he continued. Many more steps were needed. The late Pope John Paul II had visited the Holy Land, and had prayed for forgiveness and for the conversion of hearts and minds. Asking pardon purified memory. Remembering the Holocaust provided an occasion for purification, detection of symptoms and a rejection of them by taking timely and firm measures to overcome injustices of all kind.

Action on Draft Resolution

The Assembly took up the resolution on the Holocaust Remembrance (document A/60/L.12) and adopted it without a vote.

Speaking after action, IMERIA NÚÑEZ DE ODREMÁN (Venezuela) said that, when speaking of such an annihilation as occurred during the so-called Second World War, the international community must not fail to remember other holocausts that occurred during that terrible conflict or were uncovered later on, and which were attributable to founding Member States of the United Nations. She said she was referring to the annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where nuclear weapons were used without justification. Since 1945, the United States and other nations had participated in systematic genocides against the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America, which must be collectively remembered. Educational programmes were urgently needed to raise awareness about and discourage genocide and extermination under the pretext of hatred and racism.

MAGED ABDELFAH ABDELAZIZ (Egypt) said he had reservations about operative paragraphs 2 and 6 of the resolution, as well as some other aspects of its adoption. Egypt had no objection to designating 27 January as Holocaust Remembrance Day. However, the resolution failed to recognize the racist and other causes that led to the Holocaust. Also, he wanted to know why crimes against Christians and Muslims in Kosovo, Srebrenica, and elsewhere were not similarly recognized and remembered. Why should there be a remembrance day for the Jews and not for Christians and Muslims? No one had the monopoly on suffering.

He believed that the resolution should cover the victims of genocide worldwide, without discrimination by ethnic group or religion. While the proposed outreach programme was implemented, there ought to be other resolutions on similar issues, such as racism, intolerance and xenophobic movements. The United Nations ought to dedicate other resolutions and equal amounts of money for other victims.

HAYATI ISMAIL (Malaysia) said she condemned the Holocaust as a tragedy unparalleled in human history. Its lessons were universal and should be drawn upon. People would also benefit from the lessons learned from other, no less tragic events. The resolution should be broadened to incorporate not only the lessons of the Holocaust but also other acts of genocide, ethnic cleansing and war crimes.

MUHAMMAD ANSHOR (Indonesia) said his delegation went along with adoption of the third

resolution with the understanding that, while the Holocaust should not be forgotten, it was not the only human tragedy to offer such a lesson. History registered a long list of human tragedies. It would be preferable if the intention to institute Holocaust remembrance within the United Nations system also gave simultaneous attention to other tragedies.

Right of Reply

TOSHIRO OZAWA (Japan), replying to China's statement, said mistakes of the past served to teach lessons for the future. That was the only way for humanity to go forward and make progress. Japan had made mistakes, and had accepted responsibility for them. After the Second World War, it had resolved to never again be a war power but to be an economic power in the world. When discussing history, it was useful to have a common understanding on the facts. That was why Japan had proposed a series of study exchanges with China.

Statements

DAN GILLERMAN (Israel) expressed thanks to those who had originated the resolution, to all its supporters and to its 104 co-sponsors. Further, he expressed gratitude for the support of the Secretary-General, the Under-Secretary-General for Communication and Public Information and the Assembly Presidency, all of whom had lent support during the historic debate. He said he spoke in the name of the 6 million victims, as well as the survivors, of the Holocaust.

Assembly President JAN ELIASSON (Sweden) said the Holocaust was a turning point in history, which prompted the world to say "never again". The significance of the resolution just adopted was that it called for a remembrance of past crimes with an eye towards preventing them in the future.

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