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Statement by Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu, Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, on the 20 January adoption of a resolution by the General Assembly on Holocaust denial

(24 January 2022) The Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, welcomed and expressed full support at the adoption on 20 January by the General Assembly, by consensus, of a resolution rejecting and condemning the denial of the Holocaust as a historical event. The Special Adviser acknowledges and celebrates, specially, the important expression of collective support demonstrated through the adoption of this resolution, which was tabled jointly by Germany and Israel, co-sponsored by more than 100 Member States, and adopted without a vote. This demonstrates a level of collective leadership which is essential to fight the forces of denial or minimization of the tragedy of the crimes committed, of which the strong message delivered by the General Assembly constitutes an important manifestation.

“The Holocaust constitutes one of the most egregious expression of hatred the world has ever witnessed, where more than six million people were intentionally targeted and killed because of their identity, in execution of a plan that was designed and operationalized deliberately and systematically,” said the Special Adviser. She added: “The historical experience of the Holocaust also reminds us that atrocity crimes, particularly genocide, constitutes part of a process that starts with discrimination and dehumanization, and which can ultimately result in the deliberate mass killing of hundreds and thousands of individuals because of who they are. The Holocaust constitutes the most terrible example of such dynamics.”

The Special Adviser also echoed the call by the Secretary-General to never let down our guard in the face of increasing attempts to deny, distort or minimize the Holocaust. In the same vein, she called on all Member States to equally condemn and counter all instances of denial or minimization of atrocity crimes committed in the past across the world, which is especially important in spaces where healing and trust remain challenged and where the risk of commission of such crimes in the future is all too present.

As the Special Adviser has expressed in the past, “denial of genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity, where such crimes have been adjudicated by courts of justice, not only undermines justice but also divides people, communities and States. It constitutes an affront to the victims, whose dignity and respect must be preserved. Denying or minimizing the crimes of the past is exactly the contrary of what societies which have experienced conflict and have a legacy of atrocity crimes require. It is unacceptable and must be condemned.”

Special Adviser Wairimu Nderitu also welcomed the call by the General Assembly, in this resolution, for social media companies to take active measures to combat antisemitism and Holocaust denial or distortion in cyberspace. This is fully in line with United Nations efforts to address and counter hate speech in line with international human rights standards, in implementation of the 2019 United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech.

“Addressing and countering hate speech is essential for building societies where diversity is

respected and cherished. This is a task not only for government officials, but for all members of society. Peace champions working to bring people together and to counter messages of hatred, wherever they are, deserve our full and unreserved support.”

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