

**Remarks at the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims
of the Holocaust**

by Castro Wesamba, Chief of Office

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General Assembly Hall

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me start by sending the regrets of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, who could not be here today as he is in Auschwitz representing the United Nations at the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the camp.

Today is an important commemoration. As we all know, the United Nations was born out of the horrors witnessed by the world during the second world war, most particularly the inhumanity and cruelty that was the Holocaust.

It was these same events that brought the world together just a few years later, in 1948, to create the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. This was the starting point for the strong international criminal law and international human rights law framework we know today.

However, despite having witnessed the horrors of the Holocaust and committing solemnly to the promise of “never again”, the international community has time and again failed vulnerable populations at risk of genocide or other atrocity crimes, by which I mean crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The cases are many and we know them well. It was the failure to prevent and respond to the genocides in Rwanda and in Srebrenica that led to the creation of the mandate of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. Member States also responded to these failures through the commitment made in 2005 to protect all populations against genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing, known as the Responsibility to Protect principle. This principle recognizes that while the protection of populations within their territory is the

primary responsibility of States, it is the duty of the international community as a whole to respond where States are unwilling or unable to do so, through the many tools provided in the Charter of the United Nations.

Yet despite this progress, we are today faced with an alarming erosion of many of the values and systems created in response to the Holocaust. We see this in the increasing disregard for international humanitarian law in conflicts throughout the world, where impunity for such acts too often prevails.

We also see it in the growing attacks on ethnic, national, religious, racial and other minority communities from hate speech and incitement to violence, to systematic discrimination in law and in practice, as well as acts of physical violence.

These trends are all too familiar to us but especially to Holocaust survivors. This is the same discrimination and persecution that was inflicted on the Jewish population across Europe in the lead up to the Holocaust. These are the risk factors of genocide and other atrocity crimes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let us pay tribute to the victims and survivors of the Holocaust by taking these warning signs and risk factors seriously. No society is immune to them. At the United Nations, several efforts have been undertaken in the last year to address some of the risks. The United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech is one of them.

But addressing these challenges is not something that the United Nations can do on its own. We need the commitment of Member States as well. We need genuine investment in prevention at national and regional level to put in place systems to assess and respond to risk factors. We also need investment in building societies that view diversity as a strength not a challenge, that are peaceful, inclusive and based on the respect and protection of the human rights of all.

Thank you.