

**Statement by the President of the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly
INTERNATIONAL DAY OF COMMEMORATION IN MEMORY OF THE
VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST**

31 January 2018

UN, New York

Dear Holocaust survivors, excellencies, distinguished delegates, Mr. Secretary-General, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to address you today. It is an honour to share this podium with people like the Hon. Judge Thomas Buergenthal and Mrs. Eva Lavi. My words cannot compare to theirs. And so, I will make only three, brief points today.

The first is that we are not here today just to remember the Holocaust. We are also here to remind ourselves of our collective failure to prevent it. Because, the Holocaust was not a surprise. It did not happen overnight. We saw it coming, and we did not stop it. And, when it was over, we made a promise. We said, “never again”. And we meant it. But, unfortunately, this promise has not always been kept.

No, we have not had another world war. Nor have we seen anything on the scale of the Holocaust. But we have felt tremors in the ground. We have seen red warning flashes lighting. Acts of genocide. Systematic discrimination. Anti-Semitism. Racism. Intolerance. Islamophobia. Hate speech. However, we have not always acted in response.

In many cases, we have spent too much time talking for the sake of talking. Too much time fighting over the words in a resolution. Too much time delivering lengthy statements. Too much time cautioning, or condemning – without any follow-up. Too often we did not have the courage to call things exactly what they are - and to act accordingly. And, while we have been doing this, people around the world suffered.

So, we need to reflect on our inaction – and, indeed, our failures. But we must also use this occasion to inspire change. That is my second point today. Throughout history, people have acted to prevent the suffering of others. Often at great personal risk. We must remember them – and honour them. And, importantly, we must use them as inspiration, in our own work.

Here, I want to touch on the story of two Slovak men, Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler. In 1944, these men escaped from Auschwitz. They made their way back to Slovakia - the country which had deported them. Their lives were still at risk. Yet, their survival was not their main concern. Instead, they were committed to raising the alarm. They shared detailed information about the mass murder taking place at Auschwitz. Their report made international headlines. It publicly exposed the horrors of the Holocaust. Action was taken. Deportations were stopped. For too many people, this came too late. But, for tens of thousands of others, their lives were saved, because of these two men.

Similar acts of bravery are happening, today, all around the world. People are standing up, and speaking out. They are exposing atrocities. They are expressing dissent. They are warning us. They are trying to sound the alarm – before it is too late. It is our job to listen, to respond, and to prevent. And that is the third, and most important, point I want to make today.

Because, it speaks to the very core of this Organisation. It is why we are here. Everything you see - the logo on the wall behind me comes from our promise to prevent. We need more than meetings, or resolutions, or discussions. We need early action. We need quick responses. We need tangible results on the ground. All the tools to do this already exist, here, in our multilateral system. They have been used. Just not enough.

And, so, today we remember the darkest hour of our human history. We pay our respects to the people who lost their lives. And we honour those who took risks to prevent the suffering of others. But we must also call for action. Because, “never again” is not just a phrase – or a slogan. It is a promise. And it is one that must be kept, not through words – but through actions.

Thank you very much.