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GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADOPTS RESOLUTION CONDEMNING ANY DENIAL OF HOLOCAUST

United States Representative Says to Deny Events Of Holocaust Tantamount to Approval of Genocide in All Its Forms

The General Assembly today adopted by consensus a resolution condemning, without reservation, any denial of the Holocaust, with the United States, among the text's 103 sponsors, stressing that to deny the events of the Holocaust -- one of the most tragic moral catastrophes in history -- "was tantamount to approval of genocide in all its forms".

Reaffirming its landmark resolution of 1 November 2005 rejecting efforts to deny the Holocaust based on the conviction that ignoring the historical fact of those terrible events increased the risk of their being repeated, the Assembly urged all Member States to unreservedly reject any denial of the Holocaust as a historical event, either in full or in part, or any activities towards that end. The United Nations has designated 27 January as the annual International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust.

Saying that those who denied the Holocaust revealed their ignorance and moral failure, the United States representative commended the Assembly for asserting its moral authority and political will. He introduced and sponsored today's text, not as a rhetorical exercise, but because of the implications of Holocaust denial. What the world was witnessing today in terms of such denial was "masking a more dangerous agenda". As one observer had recently said, "the black hole of forgetting was the negative force that resulted in future genocides".

Just last month, Iran had sponsored a conference questioning the historical fact of the Holocaust; its President had also called for the State of Israel to be wiped off the map. The Iranian regime was also under a Security Council resolution to prevent it from developing nuclear weapons. The confluence of those three forces created a "cauldron of conflict", which could not be ignored, he said.

Israel's representative said that the historic 2005 resolution on the Holocaust remembrance had reflected the Assembly's understanding that the lessons of the Holocaust were universal; that speaking out and educating about the Nazis' brutal and systematic murder of the Jewish people must focus world attention on the horror of genocide and compel all nations and people of goodwill to recommit their efforts to preventing such atrocities.

Regrettably, those lessons were being rejected and flaunted in certain parts of the world, he said. While the nations of the world gathered here to affirm the historicity of the Holocaust with the intent of never again allowing genocide, "a member of the Assembly was acquiring the capabilities to carry out its own". The President of Iran was in fact saying, "There really was no Holocaust, but just in case, we shall finish the job!".

Placing on record his deep concern and rejection of what he saw as an attempt to misuse the General Assembly's procedures, Iran's representative said the resolution's main sponsors had sought to present the text under "mischievous" intent to pursue narrow political interests and misuse the Assembly.

The intent behind that move could by no means be regarded as genuine. If the thrust of the resolution was to condemn the crime of genocide, the Assembly, through a great number of resolutions, had already addressed that grave concern.

Iran, like many other countries, had condemned genocide against any race, group, or religion as a crime against humanity. He reiterated that unambiguous position today. However, the Israeli regime had manipulated the sufferings of the Jewish people as a cover for crimes committed against the Palestinians, including ethnic cleansing and State terrorism. The international community must not allow that regime to exploit past crimes as a pretext to commit new genocide and crimes.

At the start of the meeting, Assembly President Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa of Bahrain drew the Members' attention to a letter of the Secretary-General (document A/61/709) addressed to the President informing the Assembly that 16 Member States were in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations under the terms of Article 19 of the Charter. She reminded delegations that Article 19 states that a Member in arrears shall have no vote in the Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years.

Also speaking in today's meeting were the representatives of Egypt, Indonesia, Venezuela, Germany (on behalf of the European Union), Russian Federation, and Costa Rica.

The General Assembly will meet again at a time to be announced.

Introduction of Draft Resolution

Introducing the draft resolution (document A/61/L.53), ALEJANDRO DANIEL WOLFF (United States) said that, since the text's original submission, several more delegations had joined as co-sponsors, bringing the total to 103. On their behalf, and in preparation for Monday's observance of the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, it was crucial for the General Assembly to declare, unambiguously and forcefully, its condemnation, without reservation, of any denial of the Holocaust.

He said that the draft resolution before the Assembly built on the strong foundation of resolution A/60/7 of 2005 in making clear that all people and all States had a vital stake in a world free of genocide. The terrible events of the Holocaust had been deeply disturbing and would always remain so. That had been one of the most tragic moral catastrophes in all history, and humankind must remember to ensure that such events were never repeated. Those who denied the Holocaust revealed their ignorance and moral failure.

The draft resolution urged all Member States to reject any denials of the Holocaust as a historical event, either in full or in part, or any related activities. By so doing, the Assembly had asserted its moral authority and its political will, under the United Nations Charter, to save succeeding generations -- which was indeed the Organization's legacy, as it had been founded in that event's aftermath. He offered the draft resolution for adoption and hoped that all would join consensus so that the United Nations might speak as one on that vital issue.

Speaking before the vote, HOSSEIN GHARIBI (Iran) said he wished to place on record his delegation's deep concern and rejection of the attempt being made by certain members to misuse the Assembly's procedures to raise an issue not on the agenda of the sixty-first session and of no relevance to the items on which the resolution had supposedly been tabled. He had every reason to believe that today's attempt was both procedurally and substantively flawed. The intent behind that move could by no means be regarded as genuine. Its main sponsors had sought to present the text under "mischievous" intent to pursue narrow political interests and misuse the Assembly.

He said that, if the thrust of the resolution was to condemn the crime of genocide, the Assembly, through a great number of resolutions, had already addressed that grave concern. Iran, like many other countries, had condemned genocide against any race, group, or religion as a crime against humanity. He reiterated that unambiguous position today. There was no justice or any justification for the attempts made by some, particularly the Israeli regime, to exploit past crimes as a pretext to commit new genocide and crimes.

Many new such cases necessitated a thorough and comprehensive examination by the international community, in order to prevent their recurrence in the future, he said. Imposing a restrictive approach to such an examination would not serve that purpose; only an objective examination of what had happened could ensure that such crimes were never again repeated. Addressing the enormity of historical crimes should be done with a view to avoiding their recurrence. That required rigorous scrutiny. The necessary seriousness and sincerity of that endeavour would be undermined by political judgement and closing the door on scope and extent of such crimes.

He said that the basic principles of democracy, including the right to freedom of expression and belief, should pave the way to explore different aspects of history without arbitrary restrictions. Genocide and aspects associated with that horrific crime should not be manipulated. Regrettably, the Israeli regime had manipulated the sufferings of the Jewish people as a cover for crimes committed against the Palestinians, including ethnic cleansing and State terrorism. The international community should take strong action against such atrocious crimes and allow humanitarian sentiment to pursue its legitimate goals.

The main aims behind submitting today's resolution were anything but about genocide and the suffering that wrought, he said. The main sponsors otherwise would have referred to other cases of genocide, past and present, especially in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Palestine, and the Balkans, where enormous suffering had occurred. In view of the above, he fully dissociated himself from today's entire hypocritical exercise.

Action on Text

Then, the General Assembly adopted the resolution on the Holocaust denial (document A/61/L.53) without a vote.

Explanations of Position

Explaining his position after the vote, MAGED A. ABDELAZIZ (Egypt) said he had joined consensus on the text, stressing once again his strong belief that the Holocaust should be remembered as one of the dark points in the history of humanity. He thanked the co-sponsors, particularly the European countries, for keeping that memory alive and for working to correct those mistakes. Adoption of the resolution today under agenda item 44, "culture of peace", could serve as a sobering reminder that preventing the recurrence of such heinous crimes could only be through the international community's intensive efforts to enhance and revitalize the culture of peace, tolerance, co-existence, recognition and prevention of the suffering of others, regardless of religion, ethnicity or belief.

He said that the United Nations had a particular responsibility in that regard to promote ethnic dialogue among civilizations, cultures and regions, and to do what it could to prevent the recurrence of such crimes in all parts of the world. The painful memories of the Holocaust should also serve as a repugnant reminder of the need to combat racism, intolerance and xenophobia in all its forms, and serve as a lesson that appeasing intolerant ideologies would cost humanity dearly. The international community should not remain complacent in combating the xenophobic tide growing in many parts of the world, he warned.

ADIYATWIDI ADIWOSO ASMADY (Indonesia) said that, for more than 50 years, the world had struggled with the implications for the relationship among peoples. While there could be no forgetting its lessons, the Holocaust was hardly the only human tragedy to offer such lessons. Modern history was replete with incidents in which millions of people had been eliminated in the most heartless way.

She said the highest tribute that could be paid to the victims of the Holocaust and other victims was to prevent the recurrence of such atrocities and to stop them in their tracks wherever they might erupt. However, the question of standards of morality and freedom of expression posed certain challenges. Cartoons purporting to depict the Prophet Mohammed had created tensions among different peoples of the world. There was a need for mutual respect and freedom of expression must be expressed within certain parameters. There must also be respect for differences, especially those relating to culture and religion.

MARCO PALAVIANA (Venezuela), also speaking after the vote, said that, while millions of human beings had been victims of the Holocaust during the Second World War, the resolution should also cover

the deaths of those killed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the Palestinian people, who were the victims of excesses perpetrated under the pretext of self-defence and security, as had occurred in November 2006 at Beit Hanoun in the Gaza Strip. The horrors of the past were the best reason to demand respect for international law, international humanitarian law and human rights. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis were being victimized by actions carried out in the name of democracy by the United States. The resolution should cover the entire scope of victims and find an appropriate balance.

General Assembly President SHEIKHA HAYA RASHED AL KHALIFA of Bahrain said that, by its action today, the Assembly had reaffirmed its condemnation of the Holocaust as a crime against humanity, and issued a strong reminder that the international community was united in opposing all crimes against humanity. For the dignity of all humanity, Member States must strengthen their resolve to prevent such atrocities whenever and wherever they might occur. Quoting Edmund Burke, she said: "All that is needed for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."

Also explaining his position, DAN GILLERMAN (Israel) said that adoption of the resolution on Holocaust remembrance more than a year ago (document A/60/7) had been a historic milestone for the Assembly and for the United Nations, and an important step in bolstering the founding principles of the world body. More so, the text on the Holocaust remembrance had reflected the understanding of the Assembly that the lessons of the Holocaust were universal; that speaking out and educating about the Nazis' brutal and systematic murder of the Jewish people must focus world attention on the horror of genocide and compel all nations and people of goodwill to recommit their efforts to preventing such atrocities.

Regrettably, he said, lessons were being rejected and flaunted in certain parts of the world. While the nations of the world gathered today to voice in unison their collective commitment to condemning Holocaust denial -- without reservation, in any and all forms -- a member of the Assembly continued to deny that eternal truth. While the nations of the world gathered here to affirm the historicity of the Holocaust with the intent of never again allowing genocide, "a member of the Assembly was acquiring the capabilities to carry out its own". The President of Iran was in fact saying, "There really was no Holocaust, but just in case, we shall finish the job!"

It was against that backdrop that the draft resolution on Holocaust denial had been conceived, he went on. The international communities carried the profound responsibility of ensuring that the Holocaust and its lessons were never forgotten. The Holocaust served as a warning to all people of the profound dangers of hatred, bigotry, and racism. Joining the resolution was an affirmation that the Holocaust was "not up for question or debate". Its lessons carried such universal weight that they could not be carried solely by the Jewish people. That was precisely why the nations of the world supported the resolution on the remembrance last year and were supporting the text on the denial this year -- today's text reminded those who viciously denied the Holocaust that they could not escape the truth of reality.

Speaking on behalf of the European Union, THOMAS MATUSSEK (Germany) said he was aware that the unprecedented crime of the Holocaust had been committed by Germans in the name of their country, and that Germany's very special responsibility stemmed from that. While the Holocaust had taken place in Europe, its significance reached beyond that continent, and it was unprecedented in human history. Therefore, every 27 January the General Assembly and many Member States commemorated the liberation of the Nazi death camps, honouring the memory of the victims of the Holocaust — millions of Jews, as well as other groups like the Sinti and Roma people, persons with disabilities and those persecuted because of their sexual orientation.

In 2005, the General Assembly had created the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, he said. That consensus decision was proof of the resolve expressed by each Member State not to let the Holocaust fall into oblivion or be ignored. The Commemoration must be a defining part of humanity's common heritage and a measure of each State's commitment to a world free from genocide. The international community must understand the responsibility imposed by the victims of the Holocaust. Especially today, when ever fewer survivors could pass on their own personal experience of the Holocaust, it was vital to find new ways to keep alive the memory of those terrible crimes for future generations.

Commemoration of the Holocaust reaffirmed the responsibility to combat anti-Semitism, racism and

any form of political, ethnic or religious intolerance, he said. While anti-Semitism had been the central historical context of the Holocaust, racism, intolerance and hatred might again generate atrocities and genocidal crimes. It was the duty of every member of the global community to prevent that. But the first and foremost prerequisite for taking up that duty was the readiness to face the truth, the resolve neither to evade the truth nor to distort historical facts. Such distortions were a shameful failure of the common responsibility to ensure a world free from such atrocities.

VITALY I. CHURKIN (Russian Federation) said that the memory of the monstrous crimes of Nazism was still alive today. No one had the right to forget that tragedy, and it must be remembered in order to avoid its possible repetition. Furthermore, no one could remain indifferent to religious intolerance, racism and xenophobia. The Holocaust was not only a tragedy for Europeans, but for humanity as a whole. The adopted resolution contained an appeal to all Member States to condemn, not only the fact of the denial of the Holocaust as a historical event, but any act that sought to achieve that aim. That meant that Member States were bound to include in that condemnation attempts to revise the history of the Second World War and the merits of those who took up arms to fight the Nazis. Any attempt to make heroic the henchmen of fascism must be rejected.

Noting that the United Nations had declared 27 January the International Day of Commemoration, he recalled that that had been the date when the Red Army had freed the Auschwitz death camp, one of the largest. The memory of the heroism of the Soviet soldiers and the many millions of victims in his country could never reconcile itself with those of “opportunistic political interest” who sought to distort the significance of that history. He honoured as sacred the memory of the 6 million Jews and Europeans, half of whom had been citizens of the Soviet Union. Thus, he welcomed the adoption of the resolution and had co-sponsored it.

Expressing his strong support for the resolution, which condemned without reservation any denial of the Holocaust, Mr. WOLFF (United States) said that the Assembly should be proud of its adoption by consensus. It was shameful that one country had decided to reject it. Tomorrow would be the sixty-second anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the Nazi death camp where more than 1 million people had been murdered. That served as a powerful symbol of what could happen when tyranny and oppression went unchecked. As the world mourned those who lost their lives there, it must reassert its commitment to human rights, which had been desecrated at Auschwitz and at genocides and atrocities since then.

He said that the United States had introduced and sponsored today’s important text, not as a rhetorical exercise, but because of the implications of Holocaust denial in the world today. Some experts on the topic had said that every genocide was followed by denial. Despite the undeniable truth of the Holocaust, the world was now witnessing that some so-called scholars and world leaders were attempting to revise world history, “masking a more dangerous agenda”. The resolution was not about countering free speech or intellectual thought; it was about avoiding future disasters. As one observer recently said, the black hole of forgetting was the negative force that resulted in future genocides.

Just last month, Iran had sponsored a conference questioning the historical fact of the Holocaust; its President had also called for the State of Israel to be wiped off the map, he said. The Iranian regime was under a Security Council resolution to prevent it from developing nuclear weapons. Those three forces could not be viewed in isolation from each other; the confluence of those forces created a “cauldron of conflict”, which could not be ignored. Some would cloak their hatred by invoking the right to free speech, but there was a categorical difference between free speech and that which ignored historical facts in order to advance an ulterior agenda. Such conferences were designed solely to polarize and design hatred. If successful, that hatred could be used to justify genocide.

“To deny the events of the Holocaust was tantamount to approval of genocide in all its forms,” he said. The United States stood together with all the world in saying it would not allow that to happen.

SAUL WEISLEDER (Costa Rica) expressed support for the statement by the Egyptian delegate, saying it was to be hoped that the resolution would ensure there were no more holocausts.

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