



**Statement of Mr. Francis Deng, Special Adviser of the United Nations
Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide**

**"Lessons Learned: Holocaust remembrance and combating anti-Semitism in
2008" 10 November 2008, Hofburg, Vienna**

The United Nations joins you today in reiterating its strong commitment to Holocaust remembrance and the prevention of genocide as you mark the 70th anniversary of the Kristallnacht pogrom- a historic milestone that signaled the escalation of violence against the Jewish people in Germany and Austria, which ultimately led to their mass murder during the Holocaust. Today at United Nations Headquarters in New York, two events to commemorate the Kristallnacht pogrom will also be held in partnership with the Permanent Missions of the Federal Republic of Germany and Israel to the United Nations.

In honouring the memory of the victims, it is important to underscore the root causes of this tragedy, including a virulent anti-Semitism, racism and prejudice that first sought to exclude Jews from life in Germany, and later attempted to destroy them.

Born just ten years ago out of the need to understand this powerful force, the Task Force for Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, one of the co-organizers of this forum, was commended by the United Nations General Assembly for its efforts to develop educational programmes that will instill future generations with the lessons of the Holocaust in order to help to prevent future acts of genocide. The Task Force today has become a valuable partner of the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme, established by General Assembly

resolution 60/7 to mobilize civil society for Holocaust remembrance and education, in order to help prevent genocide.

Over the past three years, the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme has developed an international network of civil society groups, cooperated with world-renowned institutions and garnered support in the field of Holocaust and genocide studies to develop a multi-faceted programme. These activities, of benefit to all Member States, include seminars for United Nations information officers stationed around the world, briefings that are available globally via webcast, a series of discussion papers drafted by international scholars, a film series and innovative online products for educators. Each year, survivors, delegations, NGOs and the public gather in the General Assembly Hall to honour the memory of the victims. As a tribute to them, and so that future generations will learn from this history, the Programme also mounted a permanent exhibit on the Holocaust on the guided tours route at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Among the institutions that have supported the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme from the beginning has been the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, another of this forum's organizers. We are grateful for your participation in our events as experts and for the educational materials provided to us, including guidelines on organizing Holocaust remembrance days and the teaching guides on combating anti-Semitism. These materials were provided to every United Nations information centre around the world, for use in their outreach efforts. I am pleased to add that the fact sheets developed by the Council of Europe on the genocide of the Roma and Sinti were also distributed to these field offices. This wonderful cooperation with you has helped the Programme to grow.

The issue of genocide prevention has been made a priority of the United Nations with the appointment of a Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, a position that was held admirably by my predecessor, Mr. Juan Mendez. In May 2007, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon further strengthened his commitment in this area by establishing this as a full time post which I now hold at the level of Under-Secretary-General. The Secretary-General has said that the prevention of mass atrocities is one of the Organization's most sacred callings. He has visited Yad Vashem, The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority in Israel and The Kigali Memorial Centre in Rwanda to underscore his commitment to this issue. The international community's failure to act to protect Rwandans from slaughter has led to a significant rethinking of how the United Nations operates -- in peacekeeping, in conflict prevention and in how we protect innocent people from such atrocities.

As Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, I collect and analyze information, in particular from the United Nations System, which can serve as early warning of pending genocide or mass violence. Based on this information, I make recommendations to the Security Council through the Secretary-General, so that the Council can take appropriate action to prevent or halt genocide.

It is my goal to enhance the Organization's ability to analyze and manage the information we receive on possible genocide or related crimes. I must closely coordinate with the members of the United Nations system to ensure access to the data, and avoid duplication or contradiction. Thus, it is essential to help field personnel understand, recognize and report these early warning signs. Regional entities, academics and NGOs must be considered valuable partners that can help to identify best practices in the prevention of genocide. Once a course of

preventive action is decided upon, I must rely upon the United Nations country teams to monitor steps taken.

Nazi Germany's attempt to exterminate the Jews in the country and elsewhere in Europe remains the most extreme case of genocide. It is linked to a deep-rooted history of prejudice against the Jews that has resulted in anti-Semitism that is still ubiquitous today. Indeed, given the prevalence of genocidal conflicts that have deep historical roots and extend to modern times, genocide has become a global affliction. While today we attempt to identify the various kinds of human rights abuses so that they can be prosecuted and punished appropriately, this legal requirement needs to be complemented with more practical preventive measures. At the very heart of genocidal conflict remains the struggle between identities. Distorted identities that get manipulated into perpetrating a genocidal conflict need to be addressed to forge a common ground, a shared humanity, and the dignity of all human beings, whatever their national, ethnic, racial, religious or ideological identity. While remolding attitudes about how an individual forms his perception of his place in society vis-à-vis his neighbours may be a long-term project, restructuring the national identity framework to eradicate discrimination and ensure the enjoyment of all the rights of citizenship, I believe, could be accomplished in the near future.

This concept is at the core of "Sovereignty as responsibility" or State "responsibility to protect its population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity," as provided in the 2005 World Summit Document, with accountability at all levels, national, regional and international. Sovereignty can not be seen as a barricade against outside involvement, but as a charge of responsibility where the State should be held accountable for the safety and general welfare of its citizens. In the event that the State is unable, the

international community should provide the necessary support needed to empower that State to fulfill its obligations to its population.

Laws are an integral part of a very broad political power process that includes decision making. When I started my career in the United Nations you could hardly mention the name of any government violating human rights. Today, we are a long way from where we were and now have a set of standards which the world accepts and many of which have been universally endorsed. When governments break the rules, the international community must try to uphold these principles, because that is where their validity resonates with the people and with other governments.

We also need a shift of focus from crisis response to concentration on the root causes of a problem. Programmes for economic development are one instance where those who feel alienated can work with the administration and civil society. Governments should feel involved in order to cooperate. The link between poverty and victims of racism today is all too clear. Access to healthcare, education, adequate food and water, shelter and equal protection under the law are all basic needs that the international community can address, before a manageable situation erupts into crisis and mass violence.

There is a potential Hitler in all human situations. Unless we address what produces a Hitler, we will not be able to eradicate him within society. Respect for differences and the creation of a framework of equality and dignity for all are essential to ensure peaceful coexistence between and among groups. Most destructive is the divisive role of those who trade on manipulating group loyalties to build solidarity for their evil objectives. Prevention requires checking the machinations of these individuals before they have a marked impact on a situation.

My main point is that without understanding the root causes for the emergence of a Hitler, that evil within us cannot be eradicated to prevent its recurrence. We must understand and combat the currency, acceptance and encouragement of anti-Semitism in a society which has every reason to be proud of its intellectual, scientific and cultural accomplishments. We must continue to defeat each manifestation of anti-Semitism along with the emergence of "antis" anywhere. It is in this spirit that the "Holocaust and the United Nations" Outreach Programme has partnered with leading international Holocaust institutions -- all Task Force members-- to equip the Organization's national information officers around the world with the knowledge to help communicate the dangers inherent in hatred, bigotry, racism and prejudice---all of which were manifest in the doctrine and persistence of anti-Semitism.

The United Nations held the World Conference Against Racism in South Africa in 2001, which produced the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. This document contains many recommendations for tackling racism and discrimination in all of its manifestations. It also expresses both deep concern over the increase in anti-Semitism around the world and increasing prejudice related to religious beliefs. The review conference to measure progress made by Member States in implementing these recommendations will be held next year.

In 2004, the United Nations Department of Public Information launched its "Unlearning Intolerance Seminar Series" with a focus on confronting anti-Semitism. Academics, NGOs, faith-based organizations and UN staff discussed ways to promote education for tolerance and understanding. The Unlearning Intolerance Seminar Series aims to examine different manifestations of intolerance

and explore the means to encourage respect and understanding among peoples. The next seminar in this series will be held in 2009 on Combating Internet Hate Speech.

Modern communications technology has also been used to disseminate claims of Holocaust denial. Spurred on by anti-Semitism, such claims only serve to fuel the fire of hate and dishonour the six million Jews who perished at the hands of the brutal Nazi regime. United Nations Secretary-General Ban has clearly stated his position on this matter, and has condemned Holocaust denial from the early days of his tenure. "Denying historical facts, especially on such an important subject as the Holocaust, is just not acceptable. Nor is it acceptable to call for the elimination of any State or people. I would like to see this fundamental principle respected both in rhetoric and in practice by all the members of the international community", he said.

The United Nations General Assembly in resolution 255/61, further condemned any denial of the Holocaust, and urged all Member States to reject any denial of the Holocaust as an historical event or any activities to this end.

The United Nations is tied to this history and was shaped by the experience of World War II and the Holocaust. The term "genocide" was coined in response to the horror inflicted upon the Jewish people. The Organization moved quickly to adopt the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1948, which was intended as a deterrent. The advent of the Special Tribunals and the International Criminal Court have helped to strengthen our ability to curtail crimes against humanity, but as we mark the Convention's 60th anniversary this year, the international community must renew its resolve to protect populations at risk.

Another important milestone this year is the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was also deeply influenced by the events of the Holocaust. Today, one of the main objectives of the United Nations is to work for human rights everywhere -- to uphold them, protect them, defend them, ensure that they are a reality for everyone. The 60th anniversary theme is "Dignity and Justice for All of Us" and it resonates with everyone here today--educators, policy makers and defenders against all forms of intolerance, abuse and violence. Let us work together to make this a reality and ensure a better life for our children, free of past prejudice and hatred.

Thank you.