*Unofficial Transcript by Human Rights Voices*

January 27, 2017

**United Nations Holocaust Memorial Ceremony on the occasion of the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust**

Danny Danon, Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations: His Excellency, Peter Thomson, President of the General Assembly; Her Excellency, Ambassador Michele Sison, Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States to the UN; Secretary-General, your presence here today as you begin your term yields special significance to all of us; fellow ambassadors, distinguished guests, dear survivors, we come together today to remember the most devastating tragedy in history, the Holocaust, the Shoah.

We remember the victims of the Nazi regime, the loved ones lost, and the shameful treatment of human life and human dignity. We remember our history, as painful as it may be, that we learn from it and never let it repeat itself. And we remember the bravery of the survivors, those brave souls who are slipping away from us as they implore the next generation to heed the lessons of the darkest of periods with two simple words: never again.

I commend the Member States for coming together 12 years ago and passing the resolution establishing International Holocaust Remembrance Day. This important day serves as a reminder of the United Nations at its best, as it was meant to be. It serves as a beacon to our collective conscience, reminding us all of the importance of preventing tragedies like this one and the grave consequences of failing to recognize the warning signs of hatred and bigotry.

It is our duty as UN Member States, as world leaders, as human beings to work together to prevent extremism and violence by promoting tolerance, understanding, and compassion. But simply remembering the Holocaust is not enough. If we fail to learn the correct lessons, then we lose sight of the magnitude and significance of the worst crime ever committed against humanity. If we are not careful, then we run the risk of allowing the Holocaust to be misappropriated or even cheapened.

Recently, we have seen this happen all too often, including by Member States of the United Nations. The same memories, and the values of tolerance and acceptance that we teach our children, are now being misused. Under the guise of human rights intolerance, we are witnessing a growing phenomenon where Israel is subject time and again to false analogies that can be only blamed on hatred and intolerance.

Two months ago, the Permanent Representative of Ecuador stood here at this very podium and unabashedly compared Zionism with Nazism. He compared the national movement of the Jewish people, the realization of thousands of years of yearning for our homeland, to the most vile and hate-filled movement the world has ever seen. The worst part of that episode was the silence during his hateful statement. The representatives of the world who were gathered in this hall sat and said nothing. The nations of the world sat silently and did not protest as the state of the Jewish people was singled out and libeled.

When Member States do not even react while ambassadors are allowed to poison the UN, something within the institution itself has gone wrong. Sadly, it is not the only example of the misuse of the sacred memory of the Holocaust. During a meeting of the Security Council, the most powerful UN institution, the Representative of Venezuela accused Israel of committing, “A final solution of the Palestinians.” Such hate. Such lies. Thankfully, during that dark moment, a number of our colleagues from around the world stood up and demanded a clear and immediate apology for such blatant anti-Semitism.

The UN does not have an internal mechanism to prevent such misconduct. We, the Member States, are that mechanism. It is our responsibility not to allow anti-Semitism and abuse of the memory of the Holocaust to seep unchallenged into the language and actions in the UN. The sad truth, ladies and gentlemen, is that anti-Semitic language, and even action, has even been adopted by senior UN officials and agencies. An Under-Secretary-General had the nerve to say that Israel’s existence as the world’s sole Jewish state is equivalent to the crimes against humanity committed in the 20th century, and the UN remained silent.

This past March, the ironically named Human Rights Council—it’s not here, it’s in Geneva—voted to create a database, a blacklist of Jewish businesses operating in parts of Jerusalem and Israel. As during other periods of our history, dark forces wish to label our businesses, our livelihood, so that we can be delegitimized and boycotted. Once again, the UN is silent.

Today, I stand here as Israel’s Permanent Representative and say proudly that blacklists and anti-Semitic smears will not defeat us. Israel will continue to flourish as a strong, independent, and free democracy, and the Jewish people will continue to build and grow as we have done for thousands of years.

Mr. President, we are extremely fortunate to have here today with us a special guest, a witness to provide testimony, Noah Klieger. Noah made his lifelong mission to use the beautiful power of the spoken and written word to educate and warn about the evil humanity can inflict upon the world. Noah is a hero. Yes, Noah, you are a hero. Noah is a hero in so many ways. Not only did he survive Auschwitz, but he also fought in the resistance, and then immigrated to Israel on the famed Exodus ship. Once in Israel, he enlisted in the IDF and then fought bravely in our War of Independence.

To this day, Noah continues to fight. He understands the power and the necessity of using truth to fight lies. This is why he has led almost 200 delegations to Auschwitz, teaching and engaging with the next generation. Noah’s willingness to speak the truth is an inspiration to all of us. His presence reminds us that the Holocaust cannot be denied or forgotten, distorted or misused.

Dear friends, when we come together in this forum, and we are not afraid to speak up, we can make a real difference. We have to be willing to call out those who would take advantage of the UN and the international community. At the same time, it is important to note the progress that has been made. More and more political and religious leaders around the world are speaking out against anti-Semitism. Mr. Secretary-General, we appreciate your strong words today condemning anti-Semitism.

Here at the UN, we had an important seminar on anti-Semitism. This was a positive development. But the UN can do so much more. As anti-Semitic incidents rise throughout much of the world, this body must take a leading role. This is why we are asking that the Secretary-General appoint a special envoy who will oversee the UN’s efforts to combat anti-Semitism. Such an appointment will send a much louder message than any word possibly can.

Mr. President, we must not allow the Parliament of Nations to become a platform for promotion of hatred and intolerance. But this is not enough. It is important that we honor the memory of the Holocaust by making the world a better place, by pledging never to remain silent in the face of atrocities or human rights violations. We must, however, also make sure to cautiously weigh our words when comparing any events to what Winston Churchill correctly called the greatest, most horrible crime ever committed in the whole history of the world.

Upon assuming my post last year, one of my first meetings in New York was with Elie Wiesel of Blessed Memory. Marion, we are so grateful that you could join us here today. This noble man was the most eloquent voice of those who survived and of those who perished in the Holocaust. He taught all of us so much. For me personally, I will never forget how when I arrived here at the UN, he implored me to always speak up when I witness injustice or wrongdoing. One of Elie’s most famous sayings was, and I quote, “We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

Let us all pledge to heed these words of wisdom. Let us all have the courage to stand up when wrong is being committed around the world, and let us never shy away from speaking the truth in the defense of the Jewish people and the Jewish state.

Thank you.