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Organización
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Организация
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of the event

“Applying the Lessons of the Holocaust”

UNESCO, 3 June 2008

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Students,

I am very pleased to welcome you to UNESCO Headquarters for this important seminar on how to apply the lessons of the Holocaust to combat contemporary expressions of hatred.

Let me begin by paying tribute to Doctor Alla Gerber, President of the Russian Holocaust Foundation. Doctor Gerber, a prolific writer and speaker on human rights, the status of women and inter-ethnic conflict, is an example to us all of the power of the written and spoken word to effect positive change.

Let me also extend a very warm welcome to Dr Ilya Altman, Director of the Russian Holocaust Foundation and Dr Samuels, Director for International Relations at the Simon Wiesenthal Centre.

Finally, but not least, let me congratulate the five winners of the essay competition organized by the Russian Holocaust Foundation, and also thank the staff and students of the American Graduate School of International Relations and Diplomacy here in Paris for joining us today for this exchange of ideas.

The lives of many people in this room were shaped by their personal experiences of the Holocaust. While others were affected less directly, we are all united by a determination that the atrocities committed during that dark moment of human history must never be repeated.

Indeed, the driving force behind the creation of UNESCO in the aftermath of the Second World War was a collective will to build societies based on tolerance, mutual understanding and respect for human rights. In all of UNESCO's fields of competence - education, the natural and human sciences, culture and communication - this continues to be the guiding principle.

Last November at our General Conference, UNESCO's Member States unanimously adopted Resolution 61, requesting me to consult the Secretary-General of the United Nations regarding his outreach programme entitled "the Holocaust and the United Nations" with a view to exploring, in consultation with Member States, what role UNESCO could play in promoting awareness of Holocaust remembrance through education and in combating all forms of Holocaust denial. Since then, I have been actively exploring possible modalities for strengthening UNESCO's role in promoting awareness of Holocaust remembrance through education.

On 28 January this year, I hosted a solemn ceremony at UNESCO to mark the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust. This event, co-organized with the Permanent Delegation of Israel to UNESCO, France-Télévisions, the Yad Vashem Institute and the French Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah, afforded us an opportunity to reaffirm our attachment to the duty of remembrance and transmission. It was accompanied by a profoundly moving exhibition of sketches and photographs entitled "Auschwitz: the depth of the Abyss", curated by Yad Vashem.

On a personal note, I was grateful to have the opportunity to lay a wreath in memory of the victims of the Holocaust at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyr's and Heroes' Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem, and in particular to visit the New Holocaust History Museum during my visit to Israel in February this year.

In view of the importance that Holocaust Education was given in the Memorandum of Understanding I signed during that visit, we are considering developing activities to mainstream Holocaust Education through textbooks, as well as training conferences of coordinators of our Associated Schools Project Network from all regions of the world.

We must also continue to honour the victims through the preservation of Holocaust sites, such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, which was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1979 as a stark reminder of the criminal and anti-human policies of the Nazi regime.

This morning's exchange is therefore both timely and relevant. We must keep alive the memory of the Holocaust and use it as a rallying point for preventive action.

In closing, allow me to reiterate the absolute necessity for the young students here today to keep the Holocaust at the forefront of our collective consciousness through research and reflection.

As we mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we must continue to use knowledge to bring people together in the search for a just and peaceful world.

Your analysis and perspectives need to be widely read and discussed as part of our collective work to build a tolerant future free from racism, xenophobia, and exclusion.

Thank you.