

27 January: International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust

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Sunday, 27 January is the date set for the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust. In its present capacity as holder of the Presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, Belgium specifically intends to comply with the duty to honour the memory of the victims of this cruel genocide. The United Nations has chosen for this year's observance of the Day of Commemoration the theme of Rescue during the Holocaust: the courage to care.

Sunday, 27 January will mark 68 years to the very day that the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp was liberated. As a symbol of the Holocaust, this camp and so many others was the scene of several million appalling deaths. No less than six million Jews along with Roma, Sinti, political prisoners and homosexuals were systematically persecuted, brutalised and murdered. This Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust is also intended to pay tribute to the memory transmitted by the survivors. These people play a key role in educating new generations in order to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive. Their stories must live on during the commemorations in order to encourage people to remember and to prevent the suffering of millions of men, women and children from becoming trivialised.

Pursuant to resolution 60/7 on Holocaust remembrance, adopted on 1 November 2005, the United Nations General Assembly decided to designate 27 January of each year as the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust. The Belgian Federal Authorities are fully engaged in this day of remembrance, which is acknowledged as being an important reminder of the universal lessons of the Holocaust and respect for the human rights of all people, irrespective of race, sex, language or religion. In March 2012 Belgium began its 12-month term presiding over the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, an intergovernmental organisation whose members are committed to the principles set out in the Stockholm Declaration. The Belgian Presidency has turned the international spotlight on the policies being undertaken by the federal authorities and the federated entities to facilitate remembrance, education and research focused on the Holocaust, the promotion of human rights and combating any form of racism and anti-Semitism.

The awful experience of the Holocaust has also taught us that even during the darkest periods of our history, men and women in Belgium and many other countries found the courage not to remain indifferent to the injustice inflicted upon their fellow citizens. They bravely risked their own lives to save many children, women and men. These righteous people and these saviours had no intention of acting like heroes. They were simply doing what they thought was perfectly normal: helping and saving their fellow citizens.

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