



## United Nations Secretary-General

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**New York**

**31 October 2018**

### **Remarks at Interfaith Gathering: "United Against Hate"**

**António Guterres**

Dear friends, all protocol observed,

I am here to express horror and solidarity. Horror in relation to the most abject act of anti-Semitism that has happened in the history of the United [States]. Something that makes us feel totally horrified but solidarity - solidarity with the victims, solidarity with the family, solidarity with the Jewish community in Pittsburgh and worldwide, and solidarity also with the people of Pittsburgh and the people of the United States of America who overwhelmingly reject this horrendous act.

Since I became Secretary-General, I have been raising my voice against what I believe is the rise of anti-Semitism in many of our societies and namely my part in the world in Europe but also unfortunately, here also in North America. It is not only anti-Semitism that we are witnessing rising. We see other forms of anti-religious hatred be it against Muslims. We have seen Christians and Yazidis being persecuted in the Middle East. We have seen so many situations where migrants and refugees become the scapegoat of the problems of societies. We see xenophobia and racism developing in many parts of the world. But it is true that anti-Semitism is the oldest and [most] permanent form of hatred against a people in the history of humankind. Jews are discriminated and persecuted for the simple reason that they are Jews.

With the climate of persecution and discrimination in the Roman empire, with everything that happened in the Middle Ages, I will never forget the history of my country, the discrimination and persecution of Jews in the Middle Ages and then culminating with the most stupid crime of Portuguese history, the expulsion of the Jews in the beginning of the 16th century. Criminal because of the suffering endured by the Jewish people, stupid because it had a very negative perspective in the prosperity of my own country. Then, as centuries went on with different manifestations in different parts of the world with more violence and more subtle, culminating in the horror of the Nazi Holocaust.

I must say, that probably with some naïve approach, that I always felt the Holocaust had been so horrible that rejection of what happened would be so universal that it would really make us feel so angry – with that total abjection, that anti-Semitism would tend to disappear in modern societies. It was with a certain amount of surprise that I have seen that progressively anti-Semitism is again on the rise. It's on the rise especially in the developed world in ways that I find particularly intolerable.

Jews being again persecuted or discriminated or attacked for the simple reason that they are who they are. We see it in the internet, in hate speech, we see it in the way cemeteries are desecrated. We now see it in this horrendous attack on a synagogue.

I believe it is important not only to denounce, not only to condemn these acts as any other act of xenophobia or racism, but it's necessary to try to understand why this is happening.

Indeed, if one looks at our societies, we see seeds of division. We see people worried, afraid, insecure. Some because they were left behind by technological progress. Some because they don't understand the movement of people and they don't understand the richness of diversity. Some because they are the victims of the negative impacts of globalization.

I believe that it is important to recognize that diversity is a richness not a threat. Diversity will not necessarily be spontaneously harmonious. To make diversity harmonious we need to have a strong investment in the social cohesion of societies. In making sure that not only people tolerate each other, I know the rabbi and I dislike the word tolerance because the question is not that we tolerate each other, it's that we respect each other and that we love each other.

This requires a huge investment in the social cohesion of our societies. So, I believe there is an enormous responsibility for leaders. Leaders of international organizations like mine. Political leaders, leaders of religious communities, leaders in civil society. Leaders to be able to address the root causes that are undermining the cohesion of our societies and that are creating conditions for these forms of hatred to become more and more frequent and more and more negative in the way they are expressed.

We need to make sure that there is a massive investment in education. We need to make sure there are safety nets allowing those that are the ones left behind by technical progress or globalization not to feel desperate in relation to the future.

We need to provide hope for our youth that sometimes also feel that there is not a clear perspective for the way to develop their lives in our societies. We need to make a huge investment in bringing people together, in making people feel that at the same time their very identity is respected but that they belong to the community as a whole.

Let's be clear. We also need to be very firm in speaking up and combatting these new forms that are not only anti-semitism, I even see the roots of neo-Nazism growing. I was amazed a few months ago when, when in a demonstration, there were people shouting, "blood and soil." Now for many common citizens, some of these expressions that are used have no special meaning. They look like not so adequate forms of expression of patriotism. But now more and more words, more and more concepts, more and more ideas that we see on the internet, in many demonstrations in the expression of people, are deeply rooted in Nazi thinking. They have a special meaning in the Nazi ideology.

This is something we need to be very attentive in our societies because one of the logics of extremist organizations is to, in a subtle way, try to penetrate the mainstream and make some of their idiot ideas being accepted as a new normal in our societies.

We have to condemn. We have to speak up. We have to be very firm in denouncing horrendous acts like the one in Pittsburgh, but we need to assume our responsibilities as leaders to prevent these things from happening and to address the root causes that help them to develop.

Allow me a personal note. In what I read about the criminal that has done these horrendous acts, there is a reference that he was particularly shocked by the action of a humanitarian organization – HIAS – the Hebrew [Immigrant] Aid [Society].

I want to give you a testimony. As High Commissioner for Refugees, I worked with HIAS for many years. It is the most fantastic humanitarian organization I have ever met. They are the true expression of humanitarianism, but also humanism and solidarity. What they have done, what apparently this man was accusing them to do was to bring to the United States people in search of protection and to allow them to have a better life. I was particularly shocked that this organization that is the symbol of everything I considered good in the world being used as a pretext to justify this horrendous act.

Allow me to end, because I think HIAS is the true expression of that sentence, with a sentence of Leviticus. The sentence is "when strangers sojourn with you in your land, you shall not do them wrong. The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you and you shall love them as yourself for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

May the wisdom of these words of Leviticus help us all understand the need to be very firm fighting anti-Semitism, fighting xenophobia, fighting racism, islamophobia and other forms of hatred in our societies.

I pray our common God to keep us united in the fight against hatred, because if you are united ... [applause]