

A 'HOLOCAUST EDUCATION' FOR INDIA TO CREATE A JUST PRESENT

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Visitors tour the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial museum in Jerusalem on January 26, 2023, a day ahead of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, commemorating the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis during World War II. | Photo Credit: AFP

Six million Jews were murdered in cold blood — a consequence of the worst form of government-sponsored antisemitism in Nazi-Germany. Today, on [International Holocaust Remembrance Day](#) (January 27), we remember those who became the [victims of the unprecedented and systematic killings](#). Remembering the dead is our responsibility, and fighting against antisemitism and hatred is our resolve.

Violence and hatred are learned behaviours that disrupt the core humanitarian principles of peaceful co-existence and acceptance of differences. The Holocaust stands as a jarring example of the deadly consequences of hate crimes and antisemitism that made their way from the fringes to the mainstream. With antisemitism as the case in point, this is particularly dangerous when used for power-related purposes, or to appease anxieties during times of crisis and uncertainty. In this way, ideologies of hate can permeate the social fabric as human frailty gets exploited.

Unfortunately, the world is still struggling with inequality, intolerance, and injustice in many places. As evidence suggests, a host of grave economic, cultural, religious and ethnic issues continue to provoke division, hate crimes, and violence in many parts of the globe. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of antisemitic incidents against Jews all around the world. Most of these were incidents of harassment but hate speech on social media, assaults and antisemitic vandalism have also spiked in recent years. We must counter these phenomena, to avoid wider societal tension and conflict.

Today, as we mark the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, we recall the systematic murder of six million Jews. The Shoah or the Holocaust, in which Jews were systematically targeted solely for being born Jewish, stands out as a defining moment in history. Education about the Holocaust helps us understand the processes and factors that lead to the eradication of human rights and democratic values, and identify circumstances that can lead to the increase in hate speech, violence, and even mass atrocities. It is our duty to remember the past in order to understand that the relevance and impact of the Holocaust transcend time and history.

This path of remembrance is a moral imperative for many countries in Europe, and around the world. One of the key messages of Holocaust remembrance is vigilance against dehumanisation and discrimination. Instead of erasing the past, we must educate people to ensure that there is no residue of this deep-rooted history of discrimination and build up resilience to ideologies of hate and a cognisance of the effects.

Drawing from the concept of 'reparative futures', we must find ways to talk about the past by imbuing the responsibility to 'never forget' and developing competencies to fulfil the promise of 'never again' among the youth.

Important UNESCO initiatives such as the International Program on Holocaust and Genocide Education (IPHGE) are a step in the direction of fostering reparative justice. By teaching the youth to view this catastrophe as a watershed moment in history with the possibility of its recurrence in other shapes and forms elsewhere, we can equip them with fundamental skills, values, and dispositions to address future challenges, such as critical thinking, empathy, tolerance, and respect for human rights.

Coming to terms with this past is equally important for countries that are seemingly unaffected by Nazism and antisemitism. It is unsurprising that for the academic community in India, the Holocaust remains a geographically and emotionally distant historical event.

At a time when antisemitism and other forms of discrimination, Holocaust denial, and distortion are on the rise globally, we must provide the youth with opportunities to engage with this history and interrogate the injustices of the past to create a just present. Likewise, teachers need to be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to develop and deliver lessons about the history of the Holocaust that resonate with their students in today's world.

After all, forewarned is forearmed. Education suffused with learnings from the past can demonstrate, as Jean-Paul Sartre very rightly said, that individual choices or the lack thereof can indeed make a difference.

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