

UNITED NATIONS REPORT

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Educating against Extremism, Building a Better Future

On January 26, 2017, Women's League NGOs Lucy Becker, Sandy Koppell and Florence Wolpoff attended a briefing as part of Holocaust Memorial Week.

Hawa Diallo , Public Relations Officer, briefly cited the need for education against extremism and asserted that discussions between people is the only way to achieve this.

Kimberly Mann, Chief of the Education Outreach Section, explained that education can be a force for both good and evil. It can be used to justify hatred and even genocide. Nazi Germany, for example, used the education system very efficiently to demonize potential victims. The challenge today is to reach young people who have been indoctrinated by hatred and to nullify the effect of hate speech on the internet. The latter is a new and very difficult problem to confront.

Steven Luckert is Curator of the Permanent Exhibition at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the curator of its latest exhibit, *State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda*, currently on view at United Nations headquarters. According to Professor Luckert, the challenge today is that students are internet savvy but duped by the internet. Not having been taught critical thinking, students cannot distinguish between fake news and real news and between propaganda and serious discussion. This exhibit is designed to reach students around the globe and to teach them to recognize and analyze propaganda.

The Nazis were considered a joke in the 1920s; they won only 12 seats in the Parliament. It was hard to believe that sophisticated, educated people would follow them. Astonishingly, by 1932 they controlled 230 seats! Hitler, who had never run for political office or served his country in any way, utilized modern advertising techniques. He targeted his message to whatever group he spoke to, telling each what they wanted to hear. He created a symbol (the swastika) a slogan (Freedom and Bread) and an organization (Hitler Youth) all of which combined to "embrace those without peace, tormented by suffering, the unhappy and disconnected ." It was the party of youth. The party of the future. Hitler was the youngest man ever to serve as chancellor.

It is important to note that most people did not vote for the Nazis because of anti-Semitism - at least in the beginning . They were attracted by the promise of jobs to alleviate the effects of the Great Depression and the desire to restore the glory of Germany vanquished in World War I. As time passed, Germans were more than willing to believe that the Jews had started the war, that they were out to destroy the German people and that they had to be removed from Germany. So unrelenting was the barrage of anti-Semitic propaganda that Germans became indifferent to the suffering of their neighbors. In the beginning, Germans were told not to do anything to hurt their neighbors, however, eradication of the Jews was necessary for Germany to achieve greatness and they should just let it happen. Professor Luckert ended by pointing out similarities with world events today.

Prof. Jaimey Fisher, of the University of California, spoke of the enormous task confronting the Allies after the defeat of Germany. They had to deal not only with the physical destruction of Germany but also with de-education and re-education for democracy, demilitarization,

denazification, and democratization. It was a tremendous task to remove all Nazi teachers, and rewrite the propaganda out of the textbooks before the schools could reopen. Education focused on democracy in practice stressing student government and allowing students to question and disagree with teachers.

Thomas Schieb, Head of Political Affairs at the German Mission to the UN, discussed how important Holocaust education in Germany is today. It is extremely important for Germany to acknowledge its past and to pass the memories on to their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The new challenge is dealing with anti-Semitism on line.

Virginia Ladisch, head of the Children and Youth programme at the International Center for Transitional Justice, reported on her work with at risk children around the world.

The final member of the panel was Gillian Kitley, Senior Officer and Head of Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. The office works to advance efforts to protect populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. There has been a great increase in extremist and prejudiced views lately, even in the US and Europe. The goal of her organization is to identify extremism in its earliest stages and to stamp it out through education. Children must be taught to be citizens of a free society and to stamp out transgressions in their earliest stages. This can be accomplished with the help of a free press and positive engagement with social media .

Education can be a force for good or evil and the hope is that positive forces can be utilized to prevent future holocausts and genocides .