


Do You Think the World Is Getting Closer to Securing the Promise of 'Never Again'?

 [nytimes.com/2020/01/29/learning/do-you-think-the-world-is-getting-closer-to-securing-the-promise-of-never-again.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/29/learning/do-you-think-the-world-is-getting-closer-to-securing-the-promise-of-never-again.html)

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Note to Teachers: The article linked below contains photographs from the Holocaust and includes images of violence and murder. Please preview before sharing with students.

As the Holocaust ended and people in the death camps were liberated, almost immediately survivors began to say: Never again. Never again would there be a systematic attempt to destroy the Jewish people. Never again would genocide devastate any ethnic, national, racial or religious group.

In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the [Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#). Since then, 152 countries have ratified that treaty. World leaders and international organizations have pledged to work together to prevent a future holocaust from happening.

Yet in the 75 years since the Holocaust ended, there have been other genocides — including in [Cambodia](#) in the 1970s and in [Rwanda](#) in the 1990s. The world has already failed. Are the 2020s looking better? Are we moving in the right direction?

What do you think? What does “Never again” mean to you? Do you feel that genocide is still possible in 2020?

Do you think the world has learned the lessons of history? Is international law stronger? Is education better? Is the media too omnipresent to allow a systematic campaign of hatred and violence against any minority group?

In "[75 Years After Auschwitz Liberation, Worry That 'Never Again' Is Not Assured](#)," Marc Santora writes about the relevance of "never again" to today's world:

But as the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz approaches, an occasion being marked by events around the world and culminating in a solemn ceremony at the former death camp on Monday that will include dozens of aging Holocaust survivors, Piotr Cywinski, the director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, is worried.

"More and more we seem to be having trouble connecting our historical knowledge with our moral choices today," he said. "I can imagine a society that understands history very well but does not draw any conclusion from this knowledge."

In this current political moment, he added, that can be dangerous.

All one has to do is look at the backdrop against which this anniversary is taking place.

Across Europe and in the United States, there is concern about a resurgence of anti-Semitism. Toxic political rhetoric and attacks directed at groups of peoples — using language to dehumanize them — that were once considered taboo have become common across the world's democracies.

And as the living memory of World War II and the Holocaust fades, the institutions created to guard against a repeat of such bloody conflicts, and such barbarism, are under increasing strain.

Many historians and individuals have emphasized the importance of preserving the stories of survivors, and the physical memory of the Holocaust in places like Auschwitz, which now is a memorial and museum:

While the two main gas chambers were blown up by the Nazis before they fled, the ruins still testify to their existence. Visitors can see the ovens used to incinerate the remains of those slaughtered.

The train tracks leading into Birkenau, where cattle cars would arrive crammed with Jews who were swiftly herded into the gas chambers, are no longer used but remain a ghastly reminder of the scale, reach and industrialization of the murder apparatus.

Ronald S. Lauder, the cosmetics billionaire and philanthropist, has made it his mission to help preserve the site, helping to raise \$110 million to that end.

He said that while historians can speak to events, there was simply no substitute for hearing the stories of real people in a real place made of real brick and mortar.

And this anniversary was special, he said, simply because with the passage of time, there are fewer witnesses left to tell their story.

"Almost half the survivors have died in the last five years," he said in an interview. "This will be the last time we get people together."

The article concludes with a quote by Zofia Posmysz, a 96-year-old Polish survivor of Auschwitz, who was concerned about Mr. Putin's comments:

"I fear that over time, it will become easier to distort history," she said in her apartment in Warsaw. "I cannot say it will never happen again, because when you look at some leaders of today, those dangerous ambitions, pride and sense of being better than others are still at play. Who knows where they can lead."

Students, [read the entire article](#), then tell us:

- What do you know about the Holocaust? Where did you learn this information — from school, books, friends or family? Have you ever been to a Holocaust memorial, remembrance or museum? What lessons have you drawn from what you have read, seen and heard?
- What does "Never again" mean to you? What responsibility do each of us have in making sure the phrase lives on not just as words but as a reality?

- Piotr Cywinski, the director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, believes that we have “trouble connecting our historical knowledge with our moral choices today.” Do you agree? Have we fully learned the lessons of the past? Is enough being done to prevent a future genocide?
- The article mentions “the resurgence of anti-Semitism,” “toxic political rhetoric” and “attacks directed at groups of peoples” as indications that “Never again” has an uncertain future. What do you think? Are these three phenomena warning signs that mass prejudice and hatred are on the rise? Or, is the world a very different place from Europe in the 1930s, and therefore no comparisons should be made?
- The world feels much smaller than it did in the 1930s. Journalists can report stories from almost anywhere instantaneously. Travelers can easily fly between continents. Billions of people have cellphones in their pockets with cameras that can document human rights abuse. Do all of these changes provide safeguards against future genocides?

Additional background: The Times has been extensively covering [China’s mass detention](#) of ethnic minorities in the Xinjiang region. Last month, the newspaper [reported](#):

As many as a million ethnic Uighurs, Kazakhs and others have been sent to [internment camps and prisons in Xinjiang](#) over the past three years, an indiscriminate clampdown aimed at weakening the population’s devotion to Islam. Even as these mass detentions have provoked global outrage, though, the Chinese government is pressing ahead with a parallel effort targeting the region’s children.

Does that information change your opinion in any way?

- The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is committed to studying and researching anti-Semitism and genocide around the world. The museum currently has [case studies from 11 countries](#) that provide information “on historical cases of genocide and other atrocities, places where mass atrocities are currently underway or populations are under threat, and areas where early warning signs call for concern and preventive action.” Do these studies give you more confidence that the world is well organized and united to prevent future genocides? Or do they make you more concerned that “Never again” is a very fragile promise?

- What suggestions do you have for world leaders, international organizations and ordinary people to help prevent a future holocaust?

Related Resources



[Lesson of the Day: 'Before the Liberation of Auschwitz, a March of Misery'](#)
[Jan. 29, 2020](#)

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