

This paper, published in August 2019, outlines the contribution that UNIC New Delhi has made to Holocaust education and remembrance in India, in cooperation with the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme.

Holocaust Education in India

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As a schoolboy growing up in Delhi in the 1970s, I remember being fed regularly on a diet of comics that valorized the Allied Forces fighting in the Second World War. Hitler was a familiar figure too. But I had had no exposure to the Holocaust, and the systematic decimation of the Jews found no mention in our formal education. It was outside school that my mother suggested that I read *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*,* and I remember my friends and I being deeply moved by her story.

Years later, in April 2008, when the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme invited information officers from several countries to a week-long Holocaust Education Workshop in Berlin, other colleagues and I learnt about the horrors of the Holocaust. We were all were deeply appreciative of the efforts of our programme's curator Dr. Wolf Kaiser, then Director of Education at the House of the Wannsee Conference Memorial and Education Site, and Ms. Kimberly Mann, Programme Manager of the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme, at whose initiative the workshop was held.

Meeting in the House of the Wannsee Conference – and around the very table where leading officials of the Nazi Reich had planned the implementation of the decision to kill all Jewish people was a mind-changing moment. Visiting the Holocaust museums in Berlin and the disturbing visit to the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen were deep moments of epiphany for me.

The roundtable discussions with several historians, experts and diplomats underlined the need for all stakeholders – the perpetrators, the survivors, the families of the victims to come to terms with the past, to take responsibility where relevant, and to shatter the silence of those parties who could have played a stronger part in responding to the human rights abuses being perpetrated and the unfolding genocide.

On my flight back to New Delhi, I processed all this information that had so deeply impacted me, and I resolved to make Holocaust Education my mission at the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) in New Delhi.

Every year since then we have marked in New Delhi, with various supporters and partners, the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust. Initially it was only the UNIC working with the Embassy of Israel and the Alliance Française (French Cultural Centre), but the circle of partners kept growing. In 2019, we had 27 diplomatic Missions and cultural centres partnering with the UNIC in this observance.

UNIC New Delhi also worked very closely with Ambassador Danny Carmon of the Embassy of Israel for the five years that he was posted to India. Newly appointed Ambassador Ron Malka has pledged his continued support for the UNIC's Holocaust Education initiative.

The main focus of our observances has been school students, and in this the network of the National Progressive Schools Conference has been extremely supportive of our efforts to educate students about

the history and lessons learnt from the Holocaust. We focussed our energies on educating school students because we felt that the students, as future citizens, should grow up understanding how “hate” could be generated and how they could be manipulated if they were not vigilant.

Why is Holocaust Education Important for India?

As the most diverse and complex democracy in the world, India is a melting pot resting on embers stoked by history that often become inflammable. Every day we encounter new facets of hate emerging in various sections of our society. Understanding the Holocaust and the related costs of horror and pain that the victims experienced; understanding the impact that the lack of responsibility that various stakeholders shirked and avoided - all become invaluable lessons that will have a real-time impact on how India manages its social rifts and hate.

That is why every year we create an interactive experience for the students to understand the Holocaust. They view poster exhibitions, see films that are carefully selected for them, listen to speakers from various embassies, see theatrical presentations, and participate in animated Q&A sessions.

The Holocaust remembrance and educational programme of 2018, marking the International Day of commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust, illustrates the dynamic and diverse activities developed by the UNIC to engage students with the painful history of the Holocaust and the ethical and moral issues it highlights that remain relevant today. Understanding the importance of broadening and deepening the learning opportunities for students beyond only one day in the year, the UNIC developed an ambitious education programme that began already in December 2017. UNIC New Delhi invited students from seven schools to an intensive briefing session on the Holocaust, organized in collaboration with the Embassy of Israel. The briefing ignited students’ curiosity to learn about the past, and its contemporary relevance.

Appreciating the value of a multilateral approach, UNIC New Delhi worked together with the Embassy of Israel and the Alliance Française of New Delhi to organize a two-day commemoration on 30 and 31 January at the United Nations’ Lawns and Alliance Française auditorium. In a unique first-ever gesture, the programme was supported by a large consortium of diplomatic missions in New Delhi, namely, the Embassies of Austria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Japan, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Holocaust educational activities are not restricted to the United Nations’ grounds, as the example of the programmes developed in 2017 for the International Day of commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust shows. The UNIC worked with three schools - Delhi Public School Gurgaon, Shiv Nadar School in Gurgaon and Noida, and Manava Bharati India International School- so that they could display on their campuses the exhibit *State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda*, which was based on a larger exhibition curated by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. With support from the UNIC, the schools organized educational activities to help their students understand the roots and ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping, and the dangers of remaining silent and indifferent to the oppression of others.

Students participated enthusiastically in discussions about the misuse of power by Hitler and the Nazi state. They also realized the need to be more aware and responsible. The schools extended their solidarity to those whose human rights had been abused and who were under attack and expressed their concerns about several critical issues facing humanity today. As a student from Delhi Public School Gurgaon said, “with understanding comes peace, with peace comes freedom and with freedom comes responsibility”.

The students' responses are testimony to the impact of the education outreach that UNIC New Delhi has undertaken for the past nearly two decades:

"I'm moved by today's interaction. The remembrance has brought in me a wonderful change and I will always remember, never forge". - Muskaan Gandh, Sanskriti School

"We will not be able to change what happened in the past. However, we are able to learn from the past and stand up against any kind of discrimination and consequently, determine what will become history".

"Something that always struck me was a poem about the Holocaust which talked about someone who had shown indifference when other groups were targeted until they came for him and then there was no one left. This serves as a warning but also a lesson in empathy. ...in turbulent times such as these, I promise to not be a bystander to hateful rhetoric as in the last". - Mrinalini S. W., AES Delhi

Discussion questions:

- 1. Why is Holocaust education important for India, according to the author?
- 2. Why has UNIC New Delhi chosen to focus its Holocaust outreach programmes on engaging young people?
- 3. How has UNIC New Delhi harnessed the power of multilateralism and partnerships in developing their outreach programmes?
- 4. Based on the examples of the responses of the students, what impact has UNIC New Delhi's work in Holocaust education had on the students' understanding of the past and its relevance for their lives today?

* Anne Frank received her diary on her 13th birthday. A few weeks later, she and her family were forced into hiding to escape the Nazis. Anne recorded her experiences of the two years of hiding before the family was betrayed and deported to Nazi camps. Only Anne's father, Otto, survived the Holocaust. Anne's diary and other writings were found after the family had been taken away. Published under the title, *Anne Frank - The Diary of a Young Girl*, her diary has been published in over 60 countries, translated into 70 languages and read by billions around the world.