

Speech by Ms. Marie Mirlande Noel of the College of St. Elizabeth  
on the  
International Day of Commemoration in memory  
of the victims of the Holocaust  
29 January 2007, United Nations General Assembly Hall

Good morning. Je m'appelle Marie Mirlande Noel et je suis née en Haiti. First and foremost, I want to thank the United Nations and all of you including the College of St. Elizabeth and the March of Remembrance and Hope from the bottom of my heart for giving me this distinguished honor to share with you my experience in Poland. I am a student at the College of Saint Elizabeth in New Jersey whose mission calls for scholarship, social responsibility and participation throughout our educational experience. In May 2006, I was a part of group of students and faculty from my college who visited Poland with hundreds of other students and advisors from various universities and colleges in the United States and in Canada as part of a program called the March of Remembrance and Hope. Today I am representing all of us and I am going to share with you some of my experiences.

Yes, I went to Poland. I am a witness because I visited, I saw, I smelled, I touched and I felt. I visited Lodz, Krakow, and Warsaw; I went to the Jewish ghettos and their synagogues where they celebrated love, community, friendship and new births. I visited the cemetery where they used to say farewell to their loved ones. I also visited the stations where the trains used to take them away from their homes, the life that they always cherished and knew. Taken to the places of no return – all because of the dangerous hatred that can grow in the human heart.

It was there where terror, fear, and most often death, were the only options. I visited Auschwitz, where the slogan "work is liberty" meant fear, terror, cruelty, agony, darkness and eventually death. We visited and saw the commodores of humiliation, degradation, and dehumanization. I saw the remaining part of the building in which human flesh was fried. In the barracks our brothers and sisters, children, adults, men and women, were stacked on top of each other like worthless freight. As I felt the walls and the beds, I could sense their sufferings, and I could feel their daunting trepidation. I saw the piles of hair, shoes, and eyeglasses, left, but not forgotten.

We traveled with Pinchus Gutter to Majdanek and saw the spot where he was separated from his parents and twin sister at the age of ten. He never saw them again as they were gassed that very same day. From

Majdanek, we could see cars driving back and forth, as people went on with their daily lives. Yet, if I went to the city of Lublin and approached people who were alive at the time of this holocaust, where a furnace of fire never extinguished and a black sky was inevitable, undoubtedly at least one person would say to me, "I saw nothing, I heard nothing and therefore I remember nothing."

At Majdanek, I walked in the footsteps of the victims and entered the shower and gas chamber rooms imagining the horror that once was there. I touched the ovens where human bodies were toasted and turned into ashes. I stood in awed silence in front of the place where these ashes are displayed. They represented to me the destruction of the dignity and the worth of a woman, a man, a child, an elder, and I thought to myself, that could have been me, or someone I loved. I listened to the Survivors' stories and still see the pain in their eyes.

I also visited Treblinka- the terrified unknown and abandoned place in the middle of the trees. At Treblinka I saw beautiful yellow flowers bourgeoning from the ground in front of rocks that represent the unknown victims. I touched those rocks. And at the monument of remembrance, I felt their spirits and I heard their voices. I listened quietly while moving from rock to rock singing "Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound," as they were saying to me, "now that you have seen, you have heard, you have discussed, you have touched, you have sensed and you have felt, do not forget about us."

Not everyone is able to visit Poland as my fellow university students and I did, or to personally feel the spirits of the ones who perished during the genocide that was the Holocaust. Unfortunately, there is still so much suffering occurring all over our world today. I sometimes wonder how much we have accomplished or learned in teaching what happened during the Holocaust, one of the human race's most shameful footnotes, and how our methods of prevention continue to be ineffective as we lay witness to many of our brothers' and sisters' desperate struggles for survival in present day. According to Eli Wiesel, "To remain silent and indifferent is the greatest sin of all time." By remaining silent, indifferent and refusing to fight against injustice, we are an accomplice to these great evils.

Today, in places like Darfur, inhumane acts are still taking place; and I thank God that through technology and education we are able to expose the genocides that continue today. We cannot say we do not know. Each day people are treated unjustly, and not respected in their jobs and communities, because of their ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation or religious beliefs. In many places in the world, people are not well educated and they are denying that the Holocaust did take place; this denial is indeed an invitation for this barbarous act to take place over and over again.

As you can see, injustices are still happening, and as a witness to the Holocaust, I am asking you to join with me to recognize for ourselves and to help others understand that the Holocaust did happen and suffering still occurs. We are our brother's and sister's keeper and we are responsible for all of God's creation. We must be well informed in order to keep our promise of "never again" which according to Dr. David Machlis means "never remain silent." We owe it to the victims both those who perished and those who survived to not remain silent and to fight for justice for all. We must work together to insure the well being of every man, woman and child. We have more in common than we do differences, as our hearts pump the same red blood of hope for a better world. Let us all come together and become what God intended, Humans with a sense of being.

Therefore, in closing, I challenge you as I challenge myself to be a beacon of change and dare to question any inhumane treatment of others. I know that we cannot take care of all the world's injustices, but I urge you to at least identify one step that you can take toward making a positive difference, however small. This is how change begins.

Et c'est bien par le biais de l'éducation que l'Histoire sera transmise à travers les générations, aux enfants d'Haïti et du monde entier, pour que cesse le négationnisme, et que l'histoire ne se répète jamais plus. C'est nous qui sommes responsables de réaliser cette éducation.

Today you came, you heard and you learned. Don't forget about them, the survivors, the heroes like Vladka Meed, and those who perished during the Holocaust. It is the hope of the United Nations, the Program March of Remembrance and Hope, and the College of St. Elizabeth, to be a part of making a new history in which we respect our differences, and learn from the mistakes of the past, to help create a better future.

Thank you for this opportunity and God bless!