

"Hate Speech, Holocaust Denial and Distortion: Why Challenging it Matters"

By **Connie Rensink**

2020 marks 75 years since the end of the Second World War and the Holocaust, yet anti-Semitism continues to occur. This briefing examined how denial and distortion happen, looked at the broader impact, and explored ways to counter this narrative.

[Robert Rozett](#), Director of the Yad Vashem Libraries, explained that denial and distortion of history encourages the dehumanization of individuals and groups and is used to justify discrimination and other acts of violence. He pointed to less overt actions such as overextending rescuer stories to portray entire populations as people who stood up for the Jews. He described how nations are quick to blame the Germans and not take responsibility for standing by during the Holocaust. He advocates for breaking these kinds of myths by using history to set the record straight.

Tad Stahnke, [U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum](#), reviewed some of the reasons it is critical to challenge this denial. Holocaust memories are under attack, revisionist stories are growing; this



rebranding is happening on webpages, social media, in museums, in public discourse, and it is affecting mainstream understanding. Alongside there are other disturbing trends such as increased turmoil over migration, xenophobia, and global anti-Semitism. The museum is using new innovative approaches to tell individual personal stories, to normalize and depoliticize Holocaust discussions, and to cultivate global citizenship.

From left to right: **Robert Rozett**, Yad Vashem, **Simona Cruciani**, UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, **Melissa Fleming**, Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications; **Sara Brown**, The Centre for Holocaust, Human Rights & Genocide Education, and **Tad Stahnke**, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Photo/Bo Li)

[Sara E Brown](#), Executive Director of the Center for Holocaust, Human Rights & Genocide Education (Chhange) described programming that brings students together to examine hate speech, discrimination, messaging, propaganda, programming, agency & activism, and prevention & intervention. Chhange provides professional development for teachers as well as free cross-curricular lesson plans.

Simona Cruciani, UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, told how this department was founded in 1994, after Rwanda, to monitor the world for possible early warning signs of genocide. She referred to the [Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes](#) which is used to analyze a series of indicators in this endeavor. She went on to describe a more recent initiative, [The UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech](#) the Secretary General introduced last year. This working group is utilizing freedom of speech to develop counternarratives to hate speech.

In closing statements, the panelists urged the audience to be part of the solution through education programs like mindovermedia.org, being an 'upstander' instead of a bystander, and sharing these stories to foster hope and understanding.

Climate Change and the UN

By Ann Grosjean

The *Paris Climate Agreement* is a global treaty under international law which was adopted by 195 nations during the twenty-first *Conference of Parties* (COP 21) of the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\)](#) on December 12, 2015. Countries committed to hold global temperatures well below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to attempt to reduce net emissions to zero in the second half of the century.

When the *Paris Agreement* was implemented on November 4, 2016, each nation made its best effort to set its own non-binding emissions reduction goal, their *Nationally Determined Contribution* (NDC). They are required to report regularly on their emissions and implementation progress. Although it is not legally binding, it does provide a procedural framework. There are provisions to provide support for poor vulnerable developing countries, who often experience the greatest consequences of climate change, while it is the wealthier countries who create the problem. The Paris Agreement also creates a global climate effort to assist countries in dealing with the impacts of global warming.

In addition to national commitments, global business, communities and civil society are required to work to reduce emissions and transition to a low-carbon, cleaner energy economy. Investors must divest from fossil fuel and reinvest in renewable energy.

President Obama entered the United States into the climate convention by executive agreement. The U.S. agreed to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions 26-28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025. Not only would this reduction encourage economic growth, it would also reduce the cost of electricity, improve our air quality, and maintain a livable planet for our children.

Although President Trump announced on June 1, 2017 that he was going to withdraw the U.S. from the climate accord, it doesn't take effect until November 4, 2020. In the meantime, world

leaders and American governors, mayors and community leaders have committed to participate in the convention. The European Union, Canada and China have agreed to step up their efforts to provide additional clean energy financing to make up for the deficit created if the U.S. withdraws.

The UN Climate Change Conference COP 25 was hosted by Chile and was held in Spain from December 2–13, 2019. The objective was to work toward the full operationalization of the Climate Agreement and to prepare for 2020 when nations have committed to submit new updated national climate action plans. They addressed finance, transparency, forest and agriculture, technology, capacity building, loss and damage, indigenous peoples, cities, oceans and gender. They also showcased successful climate action undertaken by cities, businesses, investors and civil society.

The *United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres* spoke about the outcome of the COP 25 in Madrid: “I am disappointed with the results of COP 25. The international community lost an important opportunity to show increased ambition on mitigation, adaptation & finance to tackle the climate crisis. But we must not give up, and I will not give up. I am more determined than ever to work for 2020 to be the year in which all countries commit to do what science tells us is necessary to reach carbon neutrality in 2050 and a no more than 1.5-degree temperature rise.”

We can't discuss Climate Change without mentioning Swedish teenager, *Greta Thunberg*, who participated in rallies all over the United States in late 2019 on her way to Chile to attend the COP 25. When Chile experienced difficulties and the conference was moved to Madrid, Spain, Greta hitched a ride on a sailboat (she will not fly – too much of a carbon footprint) and headed to Spain, [where she spoke at the COP 25](#).

UN Briefing - *The COP 25 Impact.*

By Ann Grosjean

Several persons who had attended the COP 25 spoke on December 16, 2019 at a UN related briefing. *Satya S. Tripathi, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the UN Environment Office*, agreed with the Secretary-General that it was disappointing. She referred to studies of the Arctic. Thirty-nine to forty years of accumulated ice has thawed. As the ice melts, it not only leads to flooding but also releases additional carbon into the air. So far, we have lost one million of 7.8 million animal species globally due to climate change. She feels that youth are our greatest hope and that solutions are there but must be implemented before our planet goes bust.

Jan Dash PhD, the Editor of the *World Scientific Encyclopedia of Climate Change* (2020), shared the consequences of climate change: increased war and conflict, water shortages, crop failures, intense fires, droughts, flooding, species extermination, disease, extreme weather, heatwaves, climate migration, political instability, loss of human rights, and severe economic finance disruption. He went on to explain how we can mitigate climate change with collaboration

between international, national, state, town and city governments, the private sector, business, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs – DKG is a registered NGO at the UN), philanthropy and individuals. Climate education will inform students and citizens about the science and the necessary course of action. (Our Climate, Our Future) All of the seventeen UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are interrelated including Goal #13 Climate Action. (Climate Change & SDG video). Finally, climate deniers who obstruct action must be opposed. He implored the audience that we must have courage to confront the obstruction and we must persist!

Amal Abou Rafeh, the Chief of Programme on Ageing at the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), spoke about the effects of climate change on the ageing. Every country is experiencing growth in their elder population. Today there are 703 million older persons and it will double to 1.5 billion by 2050. So, how does climate change affect this vulnerable group? Older persons are more sensitive to temperature extremes and have a significantly higher mortality risk in extreme weather events. Social and economic disadvantages including poverty, chronic health issues, limited mobility, living in isolation, and lack of access to resources and transportation increase their vulnerability. DESA brings the concerns of this group to the UN; ensures the older generation is integrated and that their rights are promoted and protected in policies; and works with policy makers and civil society to provide them with a life of dignity and opportunity. They want this generation to live, learn and earn longer.

What can we do? There must be intergenerational dialogs and commitments from all sectors of our global society to work for climate change. Some suggest a next potential evolution of our earth – our lives as we know it could go the way of the dinosaurs, replaced with new inhabitants that are able to live and thrive on a planet which is hot and dry. We must all work together to do what we can to prevent this outcome.

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