Remarks by
Ambassador Syed Akbaruddin
Permanent Representative

On the occasion of
International Holocaust Remembrance Day

'India: A Distant Haven during the Holocaust'

28 January 2019

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Today is the day we gather to pay tribute to the victims of Holocaust.

2. In doing so, we also honour the indomitable spirit of all those who rose above the tragedy and became passionate voices of tolerance and mutual respect.

3. We, at the Permanent Mission of India to the UN, are therefore, honored to co-host today's event with B'nai B'rith International.

4. This is an opportunity for us to recount to the poignant tales of compassion amid the tragedies of Holocaust, and to promote the civilizational values that are key to preventing such crimes against humanity occurring ever again.

Friends,

5. India has witnessed waves of migration throughout history. People from distant lands have arrived at our shores for a variety of reasons. While

some have been chosen to live in amity over millennia, others have left when times became conducive.

6. The link between India and people of Jewish faith goes back thousands of years in history. The first Jews landed on India's south-western coast nearly two thousand years ago.

7. Since then, groups of Jewish immigrants arrived in India at different points in times in the history. These communities have retained their identity, while assimilating influence from local cultures. Their unique traditions and practices have flourished in India as many prospered in wealth and status. Their diverse contributions in the fields of entrepreneurship, art, architecture and culture have greatly enriched the fabric of our society. Some have served with great distinction in our armed forces.

8. We are privileged to have the noted scholar, author and archivist Dr. Kenneth Robbins amongst us to share how some of the Jewish faith found refuge in India in the midst of horror and gloom of the Holocaust.

9. While the world was at war, India was engaged in its own struggle for freedom from colonial rule. Yet, even during these difficult times, the people of India welcomed visitors from overseas who were escaping uncertainties in their homelands.

10. Mr. Stephen Tauber, whose family came to India fleeing from the horror of Holocaust in Europe, is here with us today to bear testimony of this time through his personal reminisces. We look forward to hearing from him about his days in India.

Friends,

11. There are numerous stories of solace offered to those escaping troubling times in Europe. One that has been told before is that of the Maharaja of Nawanagar. He, against all odds, took personal responsibility to provide home to around one thousand Polish children. They travelled all the way to Gujarat in India to escape the ravages of World War II in their homeland.

Friends,

12. Anti-semitism is a phenomenon that we in India have rarely witnessed. The only known instance of an attack on a Jewish place of worship in India was when Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists landed from outside India and caused mayhem in Mumbai in November 2008, killing 165 people including 6 people at the Chabad House. Even here, the evocative story of how an Indian nanny Sandra Samuel saved the 2-year old Moshe Holtzberg, following the brutal killing of both his parents by the terrorists, exemplifies how humanity bonds together in times of adversity.

13. As we mark the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Genocide Convention this year, we watch with concern that globally the forces of anti-semitism, racial and religious intolerance and xenophobia are posing new challenges to global values.

14. Examples of compassion and solidarity serve as beacons of hope and inspiration in troubled times. Stories of those who have witnessed horror in unimaginable ways and have triumphed, help in building across borders and generations, confidence and solidarity for the cherished values of pluralism and peaceful co-existence.

15. I thank so many of you who have taken the time and made the effort to join us here and look forward to listening to the distinguished panel of speakers share their thoughts.

Thank you.