



International Holocaust Remembrance Day

NU Chairman Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf:

“Holocaust remembrance serves as a memorial and vivid reminder of the cruelty, violence and suffering that so many human beings... have, for thousands of years, inflicted upon others.”

“Today, in remembrance of the Holocaust and its millions of victims, Nahdlatul Ulama and I wish to raise our voices in a simple, heart-felt call:

“Let us choose compassion!”

LOS ANGELES and MANAMA, Bahrain. On January 27, 2022, KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf — [newly elected](#) Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board — joined global leaders in commemorating the United Nations International Holocaust Remembrance Day, which takes place every year on the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz on January 27, 1945.

In doing so, Mr. Staquf is walking in the [footsteps](#) of his predecessor and mentor, H.E. Kyai Haji [Abdurrahman Wahid](#), who convened the historic [Bali Holocaust Conference](#) in 2007 to reject “[The Evils of Holocaust Denial](#)” and affirm religion as a source of universal love and compassion (*rahmah*).

Jointly sponsored by the Simon Wiesenthal Center and The King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence, the [global webinar](#) featured former Israeli Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, who is also a child Holocaust survivor; President Isaac Herzog of Israel; Reverend Johnnie Moore, leading American Evangelical Pastor and former member of the US Commission for International Religious Freedom; Rabbi Marvin Hier, CEO and Founder of Simon Wiesenthal Center and the Museum of Tolerance; and former U.S. Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo.

Chief Rabbi Lau, who was one of the youngest survivors of a Nazi concentration camp, focused on one word: “Why?” He asked it as a starving 5-year-old and he has been haunted by that one word throughout his life. Rabbi Lau was a trailblazing one-person crusader for multifaith interaction who promoted peace with the late King Hussein of Jordan; Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, the Grand Mufti of Egypt and Grand Imam of al-Azhar University; Hindu leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar; and Indonesia’s late President Wahid.

Lau was born on 1 June 1937, in the Polish town of Piotrków Trybunalski. His father, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Lau, the last Chief Rabbi of the town, was murdered in the Treblinka extermination camp. Yisrael Meir is the 38th generation in an unbroken family chain of rabbis.

As a seven-year-old, after traumatic separation from his mother Chaya, Lau was imprisoned in a Nazi slave labor camp and then in Buchenwald concentration camp. He has attributed his unlikely survival to heroic efforts of his elder brother Naphtali Lau-Lavie who concealed him, at constant risk, and enlisted other prisoners in this effort.

In 1945, Yisrael Meir was freed from the Buchenwald concentration camp. He became a poster child for miraculous survival, and the inhumanity of the Nazi regime, after U.S. Army chaplain Rabbi Herschel Schacter detected him hiding behind a heap of corpses when the camp was liberated. His entire family was murdered, with the exception of his elder brother, Naphtali Lau-Lavie, his half-brother, Yehoshua Lau-Hager, and his uncle already living in Mandatory Palestine.

In a [video-taped address](#) delivered at the event, Mr. Staquf drew upon the lessons of the Holocaust to call for “a just and harmonious world order, built upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being. A world order committed to the elimination of every form of discrimination and oppression. A world order that ensures stability, security and lasting peace for the diverse peoples and nations that inhabit this precious earth.”

As KH. Abdurrahman Wahid once said, “Our acknowledging the Holocaust and the historical antecedents to the establishment of Israel does not mean that we are taking the side of Israel against Palestine, or Jews against Arabs. Rather, we seek to foster reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Muslims — by employing the noblest values of religion in search of peace.”

In a speech delivered at the Palestinian embassy in Jakarta on January 11, 2022 and subsequent remarks to reporters, Mr. Staquf declared that “Palestinian self-determination is a humanitarian mandate. All parties, including Hamas, Fatah and the world community at large, must set aside their subjective interests and focus upon improving the lives of the Palestinian people. For the fate of the Palestinians is the fate of humanity.

“If the people of the world fail to ensure a better, more noble future for Palestinians, humanity will have failed in its collective responsibility to ensure a better future for everyone, by fostering the emergence of a global civilization [founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being].

“Because the problem we have with Palestine is very old, massive and complex, it is insufficient to rely solely upon diplomatic efforts to resolve this problem. We must also act outside the channels of official diplomacy.

“We must discern every little hole of opportunity in the massive wall of obstruction that stands in the way of peace and reconciliation. No matter how small the hole, we must find and seek to widen it, to ensure a better future for Palestinians,” he said.

Let Us Choose Compassion

Speech by Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf
General Chairman, Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board
Delivered on the Occasion of International Holocaust Remembrance Day
January 27, 2022

International Holocaust Remembrance Day offers us an opportunity to reflect upon the need for a just and harmonious world order, built upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of

every human being. A world order committed to the elimination of every form of discrimination and oppression. A world order that ensures stability, security and lasting peace for the diverse peoples and nations that inhabit this precious earth.

Holocaust remembrance serves as a memorial and vivid reminder of the cruelty, violence and suffering that so many human beings — acting in the name of their “group identity,” whether ethnic, racial, religious, or political — have, for thousands of years, inflicted upon others. This pattern of malignant behavior continues to threaten humanity, and civilization itself, to the present day.

The Holocaust shocked the conscience of humanity and forced the international community to acknowledge the consequences of encouraging unbridled hatred between those who possess different group identities.

From the ovens of Auschwitz and the rubble of two world wars, there emerged a broad-based aspiration to establish a new world order, founded upon the highest civilizational and humanitarian ideals. Ideals that represent our collective legacy as human beings, and embody the noblest teachings of religion throughout the millennia. Ideals that we must cultivate within ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren — in the form of noble character and virtue — until they are firmly established within, and shape, society at large.

The rules-based international order that emerged after the Second World War — beginning with the United Nations Charter, the birth of the UN itself, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — is still young, imperfect and highly vulnerable to subversion. The gradual erosion of the post-war international order threatens global peace, stability and security, and the very underpinnings of civilization itself.

The international community — including each and every one of us, as individual human beings — is faced with a momentous choice. Shall we indulge the all-too-human instinct to feel anger, hatred and revenge, and thus perpetuate the cycle of animosity and violence that has haunted our world since the dawn of history? Or shall we choose compassion and embrace “the better angels of our nature,” which urge us to love and respect one another, and unite in striving to create a more dignified and noble future for all humanity?

We do not have time to wait for anger, hatred and a collective yearning for revenge to subside. Our actions will determine what kind of world our children and grandchildren inherit.

Today, in remembrance of the Holocaust and its millions of victims, Nahdlatul Ulama and I wish to raise our voices in a simple, heart-felt call:

“Let us choose compassion!”

[Watch the entire Simon Wiesenthal Center’s global program, in partnership with The King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence](#)