



Visiting the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland, where millions of Jews and members of other minorities perished during the Second World War, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today urged that its victims be honoured by ensuring dignity and fundamental freedoms for all.

"Auschwitz-Birkenau is not simply a register of atrocities," Mr. Ban said. "In this haunting silence, we see the remnants of human life, we hear the cry of history and humanity. And through all of this, it becomes ever more clear that every life is precious. Every person matters," he stressed.

"For our shared future, let us embrace our common duty as members of the human family to build a world of peace, justice, equality and human dignity for all," he added.

The Secretary-General's visit to the notorious death camp came following a trip to the Baltic States and on his way to Warsaw to attend the UN climate change conference there.

He said that nothing can truly prepare a person for a visit to what he called "the epicentre of evil, where systematic murder unique in human history reached its atrocious climax."

"I stare at the piles of glasses, hair, shoes, prayer shawls and dolls, and try to imagine the individual Jews and others to whom they belonged," he said. I stand in disbelief before the gas

chambers and crematorium – and shudder at the cruelty of those who designed this death factory," he added.

Reasserting the need to remember the genocide against European Jews as well as the slaughter of Poles, Roma and many others during the war, he noted that hatred and persecution has not ended, having taken a terrible toll in Cambodia, Srebrenica and Rwanda.

Even today, the fire smoulders, he stated, noting that anti-Semitism retains its hold in too many places. In Europe and elsewhere, migrants, Muslims, Roma and other minorities face rising discrimination – and find too few defenders.

"The world must never forget, deny or downplay the Holocaust," he said. "We must remain ever on our guard. And we must do more, far more, to promote equality and fundamental freedoms."

The date of the 1945 liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, 27 January, was designated by the UN General Assembly in 2005 as the International Day in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust.