Statement by Ms Henryka Mościcka-Dendys
Undersecretary of State
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland

Madam Director-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,

It is a great honor and privilege for me to take part in the event which marks the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust. Each year on this day we commemorate a barbaric crime, unseen in human history - the death of six million Jews and other innocent victims who were murdered in Nazi concentration camps. Unprecedented character of the Holocaust and its horror will always hold universal meaning and a permanent place in the collective memory of humanity.

On this day, we also recall the sacrifices of those who heroically risked their lives to protect or rescue victims of this horror. They amplify the very best of humanity.

Excellencies,

The date – January is particularly meaningful for it marks the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau: The German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp. Moral obligation to commemorate the victims and to listen to the survivors is self-evident, especially in Poland which under the German occupation was the site of the former camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. More than fifty official delegations participate in today's Memorial Ceremony organized in Poland.

Let me recall that between 1940-1945, more than one million people perished in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Ninety percent of them were Jews, victims of German state-sponsored Antisemitism. Poles and other Slavs, Roma and Sinti, Jehova’s Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war and homosexuals were among other victims. We pay tribute to all of them. We remember about their lives and deaths, together with the 1.5 million visitors to Auschwitz-Birkenau, who come to see the camp each year.

Madam Director-General,

The former camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau is the only instance of such place of horror to be on the UNESCO’s world heritage list. It may seem a paradox - the death factory is a part of our human heritage. In fact, humanity should remember not only about its glorious achievements in science and culture but also about the horrible crimes that have been committed – in the hope that one day the world will be free from genocide and mass atrocities.
Memory speaks. That is why it must be preserved and passed to future generations. The Holocaust has important lessons to teach us all, especially in the light of a rise of extremist violence worldwide. The recent terrorist attack in Paris is a painful reminder that it remains a serious problem which must be addressed. The United Nations must play a leading role in combatting all forms of intolerance, hatred, discrimination and violence. Promotion of tolerance and mutual respect is a moral imperative. Therefore, everyday work of UNESCO in the field of education for Holocaust remembrance as well as more broadly, education about other forms of genocide are essential for the preservation of human rights and basic freedoms. Today’s ceremony may serve as a model example of such activity.

I am particularly proud, that last year UNESCO together with the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, the oldest university in Poland and one of the oldest in the world, established the new Chair for Holocaust Education. In the light of the rebirth of racist, nationalist and Antisemitic attitudes, is a timely decision. We hope that new Chair will help to overcome these negative trends.

Excellencies,

As we commemorate this anniversary and remember the victims of the Holocaust let us reaffirm our faith in the dignity of humankind. Let us use this opportunity to rededicate ourselves to the elimination of extremism and promotion of tolerance and mutual respect.

Thank you for your attention.