

Speaking Notes

For Mario Silva

The Rise of Anti-Semitism in Canada
“Then and Now” Conference
Canadian Society for Yad Vashem

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Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here with you today as Chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

I'd like to begin by saluting the Canadian Society for Yad Vashem for organizing this educator's conference. And to thank also the distinguished speakers you will hear from over the next two days for agreeing to offer their insights.

History provides far too many examples of man's inhumanity to man: social injustice, religious oppression, cultural clashes, ideological wars, class hatred, and most every other form of racism and intolerance.

One particular form, however, stands out amongst all others: Anti-Semitism; unique in its universality, intensity, longevity and irrationality.

The term anti-Semitism originated with a German journalist Wilhelm Marr in 1879, and denotes prejudice or the hatred of Jews.

Yet the hatred of Jews predates the use of the term anti-Semitism.

History records many manifestations including the many pogroms carried out over the centuries in countries around the world, the creation of blood libels – false rumours that Jews use the blood of Christian children for ritual purposes.

More recently, there was the publication of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which promotes a fraudulent theory of an international Jewish conspiracy and an increase in anti-Semitism in the form of hate speech, violence and denial of the Holocaust.

Internationally, we see regular media reports of incidents of violence motivated by hate on an almost daily basis, whether it is anti-Semitic propaganda or the desecration of synagogues, violence or assaults, or attempts to institute regulations that systematize hate against the Jewish community.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are dealing with a widespread, serious and ongoing problem.

A U.S. State Department report on religious freedom released in early May found what it called a “continued global increase in anti-Semitism”.

In addition, a study published by Tel Aviv University’s Kantor Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry says anti-Semitic activity in 2012 increased by 30 percent over the previous year.

We are fortunate in Canada to have a strong legal framework and a cohesive multicultural society that has proven itself capable of resisting much of the extremist ideologies that have gained a foothold in many parts of the world.

Yet, we are still vulnerable. Witness in January the planned protest that blamed a Zionist Plot for the recent sectarian violence in Pakistan and, in February, the defacing of the Mishkan HaTorah Yeshiva in Toronto with hateful, anti-Semitic graffiti.

But we are taking action.

In November 2010, Canada hosted the second *Inter-parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antisemitism* conference in Ottawa, where the government signalled its support for the principles of the London Declaration and ratified the Ottawa Protocol.

The Ottawa Protocol calls on leaders of faith groups to combat hatred and discrimination, including anti-Semitism; governments to reaffirm and implement the United Nations' 1948 Genocide Convention; the establishment of an international task force to identify and monitor hate on the Internet and the development of a comprehensive system to record all hate crimes, including anti-Semitic ones.

Canada became the first country to sign the Protocol in September 2011 and, as IHRA Chair, I urge other countries to lend their support to it.

Two years ago, I was proud to Co-Chair the *Canadian Parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antisemitism*, which was formed to develop strategies for confronting and combating anti-Semitism in Canada.

Our 2011 report found that the scourge of anti-Semitism is a growing threat in Canada, especially on the campuses of our universities, where activities such as ‘Israel Apartheid Week’, have become annual events, which all too often are accompanied by anti-Semitic harassment, intimidation and bullying.

The Government of Canada has been consistent in condemning these events and urged participants to reconsider their involvement in an activity that selectively condemns and denies the only Jewish state’s right to exist, which can create a hateful environment.

Statistics Canada reports that in 2010, 395 hate crimes motivated by religion were reported to the police in Canada – 204, just over half, were committed against Jews. Further, data from B’nai Brith’s 2012 audit of anti-Semitic incidents shows that Canada has seen a steady upward progression in anti-Semitic incidents in the past decade.

It is important to note here that hate crimes are also one of the most under-reported crimes, so police-reported data very likely undercount the true extent of hate crime in Canada, as not all incidents would come to the attention of police. It is estimated that only about one-third of incidents perceived by victims to have been motivated by hate were subsequently reported to police.

In several European countries, reporting incidents of hate-motivated vandalism to the police has provoked further cases of hate-motivated mischief.

Individually and collectively, we have an obligation to fight discrimination that leads to the exclusion of groups of people and spreads hatred.

As we know, the Holocaust was the most extreme manifestation of anti-Semitism the world has ever seen. It rested firmly on the foundations of religious prejudice and a century of anti-Semitic speech, petty violence, vandalism, and failure of effective government action.

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper once stated: “While the Holocaust stands alone, it does not stand isolated. It is but the most hellish chapter in the long and continuing history of anti-Semitism.”

Each of us has a role in helping the world remember, not only what happened, but why – how hate and intolerance transformed neighbours into victims and perpetrators.

The purpose of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, or IHRA, is to place political and social leaders' support behind the need for Holocaust education, remembrance and research both nationally and internationally.

IHRA was established in 1998, through the initiative of former Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson, who conceived a vision to have a co-operative group of countries work together to expand Holocaust education remembrance and research worldwide.

In 2000, the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust was adopted, which serves as the founding document of IHRA.

The Stockholm Declaration emphasizes the importance of upholding the “terrible truth of the Holocaust against those who deny it,” and of preserving the memory of the Holocaust as a “touchstone in our understanding of the human capacity for good and evil”.

The commitment of the international community to the principles of the Stockholm Declaration was the starting point for many countries to begin a public debate on their national history and to acknowledge their role during the Second World War related to the Holocaust.

The issues are difficult: What happened during the war? What did our country do? What did it not do? And what are the lessons for us to learn to ensure it never happens again?

As Yehuda Bauer, Honorary Chair of IHRA, once put it, no one comes out clean from this painful, but vital, self-scrutiny and soul-searching.

While Canada did not directly experience the Holocaust, its history is not untouched by the tragedy.

Canada's restrictive immigration policies, and anti-Semitic sentiments, largely closed the door on Jews seeking to flee Europe. In addition, as a result of Canada's wartime policies, nearly 2,300 men, mostly Jewish refugees from Austria and Germany, were interned as 'enemy aliens' in camps across Canada between 1940 and 1943.

But the Canadian experience of the Holocaust is also one of resilience and hope. In April 1945, Canadian forces liberated Westerbork Transit Camp in the Netherlands and some 900 Dutch Jews who were still interned there.

As a nation, Canada has also been profoundly shaped by the approximately 40,000 Holocaust survivors who resettled across the country after the war.

Canada's membership in IHRA reflects our commitment to ensuring that future generations understand the causes of the Holocaust in order to help ensure that such a tragedy never happens again.

Today, IHRA has expanded from its three founding members (Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States), to 31 countries. Canada became a member in 2009, and is Chair until next March.

Our work focuses on three areas: education, remembrance and research.

Holocaust education is an essential tool in overcoming ignorance and hate. Through an annual IHRA grant program, we've supported hundreds of education projects all over the world, and IHRA educational experts have developed comprehensive guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust, published in 18 languages, which are being used by dozens of school systems around the world.

As part of Canada's ongoing commitment, and in conjunction with our Chair year, the Government of Canada recently

launched an Award for Excellence in Holocaust Education. Our hope is to not only award a deserving educator, but also to promote best practices and innovative educational approaches.

We also believe that providing students with a clear and well-informed understanding of the Holocaust will help them understand other genocides, mass atrocities and human rights violations.

Survivors bearing witness through their personal stories have been an integral part of Holocaust education and remembrance.

The preservation of their oral and written testimonies is of particular importance at a time when anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial are on the rise. I'm pleased that the Government will be working with Canadian Holocaust Education Centres to find ways to preserve survivor testimony as an invaluable tool for Holocaust education.

We are mindful of Primo Levi's warning that "those who deny Auschwitz would be ready to remake it". In 2009, IHRA established a Standing Committee on Anti-Semitism and Holocaust Denial to address this urgent issue.

Promoting a culture of remembrance is also critical. With the generation of Holocaust survivors and death camp liberators

now reaching their eighties and nineties, the window is closing on those able to provide eyewitness accounts.

An extraordinary amount has been achieved in IHRA member states to ensure that the Holocaust has a permanent place in national memories.

Particular importance is attached to memorials at historic sites, memorial museums, and the implementation of national Holocaust remembrance days.

IHRA's experts develop guidelines for commemorative events to ensure that there are links between those events and their necessary educational components.

In Canada, the soon to be established National Holocaust Monument will recognize how Canadians and Canadian history have been affected and will help ensure the memory of the Holocaust is never lost.

Archival materials also facilitate historical memory and IHRA experts will be focusing on the accessibility of Holocaust-era archives in both member and non-member states.

The archival issue is important because anecdotal evidence suggests that hundreds of millions of documents related to

Holocaust history still remain inaccessible in both private and state archives around the world.

Still, while hurdles exist to full accessibility, important progress is being made.

IHRA was involved in the agreement that opened the archives of the International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen, Germany, in which over 50 million Holocaust-era and immediate postwar documents once held by the Red Cross are now stored.

These archival collections have tremendous memorial, moral and scholarly significance. They will be of profound value in revealing the fates of the estimated 17.5 million people touched by the tyranny of the Nazi regime.

To assist researchers here in Canada, Library and Archives Canada is developing a new research guide on their Holocaust-era records and how they may be accessed.

On research, killing sites outside of the major death camps are an emerging area of inquiry. The Holocaust is mostly associated with Auschwitz and with the industrial-scale killing of the death camps.

But more than 2.5 million Jews and thousands of Roma/Sinti people in Eastern Europe were killed between 1941 and 1944 by in what Father Desbois has called “The Holocaust by Bullets”.

The most infamous site is Babi Yar in Ukraine – a site I visited in March this year, where over 33,000 Jews were killed over a two-day period.

Hundreds, even thousands, of these sites of mass murder have yet to be identified, marked or memorialized. IHRA will bring together institutions working in this area at an international conference in Poland next January to consider opportunities for cooperation and further work in the field.

In Canada, research on the Holocaust will be supported through an international academic conference that will take place on October 6-7 at the University of Toronto. The theme is *New Scholars, New Research on the Holocaust* and will target young scholars.

During my chairmanship, I will also pursue partnerships with other international bodies that focus on different aspects of Holocaust memorialisation in order to better align our efforts -- bodies like the UN, OSCE, UNESCO, the Claims Conference, the Council of Europe, and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.

I will also be working to raise awareness of the Holocaust in Canada and around the world, and to demonstrate the relevance of IHRA.

Over the last few months I've had the opportunity to visit IHRA member states, such as Germany, the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Croatia, Israel, and many others.

I will continue to work with IHRA observer countries, Portugal, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bulgaria and Turkey, to encourage their ascension to full membership.

As well, I will continue outreach to important non-member states affected by the Holocaust, such as Ukraine.

In October, I will host a 3-day meeting of IHRA delegates in Toronto, in follow-up to a successful meeting held last month in Berlin.

I'd like to conclude my remarks now by impressing upon you that anti-Semitism is not just a Jewish problem, but a human problem.

History has shown us that wherever anti-Semitism has gone unchecked, the persecution of others has been present or not far behind. Defeating anti-Semitism must be a cause of great

importance not only for Jews, but for all people who value humanity and justice.

Our politicians and leaders of civil society must unequivocally condemn all manifestations of anti-Semitism and demonization of Israel, and denounce and take action against all those who seek to resort to it.

In the aftermath of the moral and societal failures that made the Holocaust possible, confronting anti-Semitism and all forms of hatred is critical.

To all the educators present today, I give you my thanks – you are powerful agents in this important endeavour.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to you today.