

Speech of

Dr. Mario Silva

**At the Handover Ceremony of the Chairmanship of the
International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance**

Berlin, Germany

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has been an honour for me to have served on behalf of Canada as Chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance for the past year.

As I step down, I'd like to take the opportunity to reflect back on the accomplishments that IHRA has achieved this last year, and express my gratitude for the generous support that contributed to such a successful year.

Canada started its chairmanship with a commitment to an ambitious agenda. Our goals were to raise IHRA's visibility, increase co-operation with international organizations, combat anti-Semitism, and advance the Multi-Year Work Plan. I am pleased to report progress in each of these areas.

As Chair, I made significant efforts to reach out to non-member countries, organizing meetings both in Canada and abroad. As a result, representatives from Ukraine, South Africa, Albania, and Australia attended IHRA meetings in Berlin and Toronto as special guests, and Uruguay joined IHRA as a new observer country at the Toronto plenary meeting. Recently, El Salvador has expressed interest in becoming an IHRA observer country. I also had a successful visit to the Holy See, along with Kathrin Meyer, Steven Katz, Sir Andrew Burns and the support of other local ambassadors.

To strengthen our cooperation with IHRA's Permanent International Partners, I held several meetings to discuss opportunities for further cooperation, and I'm happy to report that an agreement was reached to pursue a joint project to help build the capacity for Holocaust education and remembrance in non-member countries.

During the last year, I also reached out to other international organizations, including the European Commission, the International

Tracing Service, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In addition, I took the opportunity to engage more closely with member countries, travelling to hear their concerns and see the tremendous work they are carrying out to advance the goals of the Stockholm Declaration.

This last year saw IHRA take great strides in its efforts to combat anti-Semitism, as well. At the October plenary in Toronto, IHRA became the first international body to adopt a working definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion. This definition will help identify and address a growing manifestation of contemporary anti-Semitism. In addition, IHRA approved new annual committee reporting with respect to anti-Semitism.

There was also significant progress under IHRA's multi-year work plan, with funding approval to advance priorities on killing sites research,

access to Holocaust-era archives, and Holocaust education and commemoration.

Without diminishing the work being carried out in other priority areas of the multi-year work plan, I'd like to highlight the highly successful symposium for experts on killing sites that was held in Krakow, Poland in January. A summary report of the symposium is being prepared, which will help inform IHRA's work in this area going forward.

As well, the first phase of work on Archival Access was launched in June, with a survey to member states seeking information on researchers' experiences at archives across the world. Interim results of the survey presented at the plenary in October indicated there are challenges with legal obstacles, prohibitive costs and the closing of archives. Further review of the data and information gathering will take place over the coming year, and I look forward to the results.

IHRA's working groups and committees also had a fruitful year. In addition to the adoption of the definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion, which was developed by the Anti-Semitism and Holocaust Denial Committee, the Academic Working Group also had a major achievement. On their advice and supported by the plenary, I engaged with the European Union regarding IHRA's concerns on a proposed EU data protection regulation (Article 83) and its potential negative effects on archival access. Following our meeting, the EU advised that our concerns would be addressed with additional language to ensure sufficient safeguards are in place.

As with any organization, there are always opportunities to refine how we do business. During my chairmanship, plenary approval was given to institute inaugural working rules, and to establish an annual IHRA Chair Report to track progress. In addition, a new structure for expert meetings was piloted in Toronto, and communication was increased between meetings through a monthly Chair e-newsletter and the use of social media.

I believe IHRA can look back with pride on what we have achieved this past year.

While each member of IHRA contributes to its success, it is the steady hand of Dr. Kathrin Meyer, the Executive Secretary of the Permanent Office, and her team of professionals that keep us on course.

I would also like to thank my Canadian team at Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the Foreign Affairs network for the diligent support they have provided me over the course of my chairmanship.

And now I am delighted to pass the Chair of IHRA to the United Kingdom and the strong leadership of Sir Andrew Burns. I would like to thank Sir Andrew for his support during Canada's chairmanship and I look forward to reciprocating this year as part of the Troika. Thank you.