

**Speech on the occasion of the Handover of the IHRA Chairmanship.**

**Berlin 05 March 2013**

Honorable Minister,

Excellencies,

Dear Colleagues,

Let me start by thanking the Canadian Chargé d’Affaires and the Canadian Embassy for their hosting of the handover ceremony in this magnificent building.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A year ago, in this same city, Belgium took up the Chairmanship of the “Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research”.

I can best describe my appreciation of that moment as “mixed feelings”.

Just to mention one example among others: in the presence of Professor Daniel Libeskind we were launching the logo he graciously designed for us. We did however not know what the new name for the Task Force would be. We only knew what it could not be.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Belgian Chairmanship has been fortunate. In the rather unusual environment we started in, I got tremendous support from the overwhelming majority of the membership, the Honorary Chairman and Advisor and the invaluable help of the Executive Secretary, Dr. Kathrin Meyer and her team. Why did they support us? Because these member States and these individuals believe in what the task Force was doing and in the need to continue as a group of member States with a common purpose: to promote education, remembrance and research about the Holocaust.

The adoption of our new name, “International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance” (IHRA) at the Liège Plenary session, demonstrated clearly this common purpose. This new name also symbolizes the renewal of our commitments we solemnly engaged in when adhering to the Stockholm Declaration.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The membership's support was also essential to initiate the Multi Year Working Plan, conceived during the Dutch Chairmanship as an element to enhance internal cohesion and between the successive Chairmanships. The MYWP will doubtless strengthen our efforts to promote Education, Remembrance and Research about the Holocaust.

Whereas the Working Groups will structurally remain the backbone of the IHRA, the four interrelated MYWP initiatives will, under the guidance of the Steering Committees, shape the course of the IHRA in the coming years by providing a clear strategy, defined and achievable goals, and measurable outcomes.

To implement this important agenda, institutional stability is a prerequisite.

The hard work of the Legal Drafting Group under the Chairmanship of our Austrian colleagues has confirmed the legal situation under German law of the Association and the Permanent Office. The working rules will complete this impressive framework.

Dear Friends,

In today's uncertain and volatile political, economic and social environment, the challenges IHRA is facing, are tremendous.

The generation of Holocaust survivors is inevitably disappearing. Direct witnesses become increasingly rare.

Many groups would prefer to see the Holocaust treated as "another fact of history", even if the history of the Shoah is still incomplete. Many white spots remain and fundamental questions are unanswered.

Intolerance, racism and antisemitism are unfortunately on the rise again.

It is only by developing our sense of common purpose, preferably with other non-governmental and governmental actors in this field, that we, the IHRA members, can achieve our goals in this difficult environment. I know that the future Chairmanships may count on the full support, in the same way Belgium has been supported over the last twelve months.

I take this opportunity to wish the Canadian incoming Chair, Dr. Mario Silva, and his team good luck and all success in their endeavors to make IHRA a flourishing, result-oriented alliance.

Thank you for your attention.