

Opening UK Remarks at the IHRA Handover of Chairs: Berlin 2014

- It is a great honour to address you today as I assume the Chairmanship of the IHRA. I am very grateful to the British Ambassador for his hospitality today and the care and attention of his Embassy staff. Thank you for coming. It is a particular pleasure to welcome among us today:
 - The President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, Mr Vivien Wineman from London
 - Mr Gergely Prohle the Head of the Hungarian delegation from Budapest who will be assuming the chairmanship of IHRA in 2015
 - Kathrin Meyer, the Executive Secretary of the Permanent Office of the IHRA and her tremendously hard working team.
- What I want to do now is to introduce the British Chairmanship and outline our strategic priorities.
- The UK was one of the founding members of the organization then known as the International Task Force (ITF) and our commitment to the Stockholm Declaration of 2000 and its principles is as strong as ever, at governmental and political levels as well as within civil society.
- My own appointment four years ago as the UK Envoy for Post-Holocaust Issues was one of Foreign Secretary William Hague's first steps on taking office. It was a novel departure from previous practice but reflected intense pressure from within British society for someone to give more of a lead to the British contribution to the resolution of post-Holocaust Issues.
- We are here today to discuss Holocaust education, research and remembrance, the struggle against historical revisionism, the fight

against Holocaust denial and denigration - indeed the continually urgent fight against antisemitism and racial, religious and ethnic prejudice.

- But there are plenty of other issues too that preoccupy me and those in other governments across Europe and beyond who share the Stockholm commitments: restitution of confiscated property and looted art, social welfare for the remaining Holocaust survivors and their families, the preservation and opening up of archives, including those on displaced persons and victims of Nazism at Bad Arolsen belonging to the International Commission of the International Tracing Service, of which Germany and the UK are both members.
- In January, the British Prime Minister, David Cameron launched a new national Holocaust Commission. The Commission is tasked with ensuring that the United Kingdom has a permanent memorial to the Holocaust and educational resources for future generations. The Commission includes representatives from across society in the fields of culture, religion, media, education, politics, and business. The work of the Commission will be supported by two expert groups investigating Holocaust education and commemorative events, memorials and museums. The Commission will report its findings to the Prime Minister by the end of the year. I hope to bring Members of the Commission to talk to IHRA experts at our first meeting in May in London.
- It is naturally a matter of great satisfaction for the UK that we are taking over the IHRA Chairmanship from Canada, with whom the UK has always had a particularly close relationship. And my first duty is to take this opportunity to thank the Canadian Chair Dr Mario Silva and his team very warmly indeed for the leadership they have provided throughout

this past year and for the substantial achievements which IHRA has been able to accomplish under their Chairmanship.

- It was under the Chairmanship of the Netherlands exactly three years ago that a White Paper was presented to IHRA identifying and addressing some of the challenges we were facing. During the last three years, under the Chairmanships of the Netherlands, Belgium, and Canada, IHRA has made great progress, as you have already heard. The most apparent were the adoption of a new visual identity and the choice one year ago of a new name, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in place of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (the ITF).
- These changes went hand in hand with a brand new website and the effective use of more modern communication tools in the social media. My first challenge is to use Twitter.
- There were critically important procedural decisions over the last year relating to our working rules and our future work programme. But there were important advances in substance too and that is why I want to give you our, British, White Paper to take away with you so that you can brief your governments on the direction which IHRA will be taking in this 70th year after WWII.
- When we first accepted the chairmanship I outlined four core tasks ahead of us:
 - To strengthen and deepen the professional expertise and knowledge of IHRA and thus enhance its reputation and influence.
 - To improve the ways in which the conclusions and concerns of the expert and civil society members are conveyed to, understood by

and acted upon by Heads of Delegation and our political leaderships

- To promote the public visibility and greater impact of IHRA through its public diplomacy and participation in discussions in other fora and walks of life, particularly in our Parliamentary and legislative bodies
- To make a real practical contribution to tackling the outstanding contemporary challenges: rising antisemitism and incidents of Holocaust glorification, trivialisation and denial; justice, respect and support for Holocaust survivors; education of the young; and opening up of the historical record.
- We cannot get away from issues of cost which bear very heavily on Chairs and affect the willingness of governments to volunteer. We have proposals to address these. But we want to preserve what is unique about IHRA. IHRA brings together policy-makers and experts - academics, administrators, survivors, educationalists, researchers, curators – in a kind of networking forum which stimulates both policy discussion and a fruitful interaction among experts from so many different countries and disciplines.
- It is indeed these interdisciplinary opportunities which enrich the current multi-year programme which gives priority to four key areas of work. One literally ground-breaking topic examines the Killing Sites and Mass Graves in Eastern Europe, about which so much remains to be discovered and preserved. We think of the extermination and concentration camps under National Socialism. But well over 2 million people were killed on the outskirts of their towns and villages. We have to consider how to mark and preserve these sites and how to

commemorate them. The IHRA conference in Krakow in January was path-breaking, profoundly moving and a strong stimulus to further work.

- We also look forward to continued progress on the other three pillars of the multi-year work plan. We shall be commencing important new research on the real impact of Holocaust education through a wide ranging research project which will draw on new research on what it is that students understand from their study of the Holocaust. We also look forward to the results of IHRA's yearlong survey on archival access and to developing further ways of accessing archival material that still remains to be opened and examined. Furthermore we will continue our successful outreach to countries within the IHRA and beyond looking for ways to cooperate on making Holocaust Memorial Days carry greater impact and developing together an international culture of Holocaust remembrance.
- We need to remain alert and outspoken when antisemitism or Holocaust denial raise their ugly heads. Hate speech and historical revisionism are often early signs of trouble, but we know in all our societies how necessary constant vigilance is. We want to reach out to all those European countries that experienced the Holocaust and bring them into our discussions and debates. And we want to respond to the strong expressions of interest we receive from countries outside Europe who were nonetheless affected by the Holocaust or where large survivor populations live.
- IHRA has resources to give grants to fledgling organisations and to co-fund major programmes of research. This year, next week in fact, IHRA will assess over 40 applications for funding of projects that range from

the innovative use of social media to archival research and the Roma genocide.

- We have a duty too to go beyond an examination of history and bring our own understanding of the lessons of the Holocaust to bear on contemporary discussions of how to prevent genocide and ethnic cleansing in future. I shall be sharing these fruits of our discussions when I will be representing IHRA this spring at conferences on genocide prevention in Costa Rica, Belgium and Austria.
- We also have an opportunity to work more closely and productively with other international organisations concerned with Holocaust education, genocide prevention and related issues. I think of the Council of Europe, ODHIR/OSCE, the European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency, the UN, UNESCO and the Jewish Claims Conference.
- In 2014 the UK Chairmanship will hold two Plenary meetings, the first in London from 12-15 May and the second in Manchester from 1-4 December.
- The May meeting will be held at Lancaster House, scene of so many historically important international meetings. The week will begin with an IHRA-funded Conference on the Roma Genocide organised in cooperation with IHRA's own expert Committee on this topic and the Centre for Holocaust Education at the Institute of Education at the University of London. It will continue with four days of expert and policy-making deliberations in an atmosphere of intensive networking and debate, culminating in a day-long plenary meeting of Heads of Delegation. And it will conclude with a panel discussion about the Allied response to the alarm bells sounded by the Polish wartime courier Jan Karski in 1942.

- We shall announce our plans for December in due course.
- Finally as we approach the 70th Anniversary of the liberation of the camps and the end of WWII, and as we mark the 15th Anniversary of the Stockholm Declaration on 2000, we invite all those associated with IHRA to consider how our governments and societies might best reaffirm the Stockholm Principles and our collective determination “to remember the victims who perished, respect the survivors still with us and reaffirm humanity’s common aspiration for mutual understanding and peace”.