



International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

Multi-Year Work Plan: Holocaust Memorial Days Report on the IHRA Visit to Finland, January 2015

An IHRA delegation including the Advisor to the IHRA, Prof. Steven Katz, the Executive Secretary, Dr. Kathrin Meyer, and the Project Assistant, Julana Bredtmann, participated in a program on Holocaust education and remembrance organized by the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Helsinki, Finland from 25 to 28 January. The visit is part of IHRA's Multi-Year Work Plan project on Holocaust Memorial Days, which aims to foster Holocaust education, remembrance and research, promote the goals of the Stockholm declaration, and raise awareness about IHRA's work. The Finnish Head of Delegation expressed interest in working with the newly formed Steering Committee on Holocaust Memorial Days under the Belgium Chairmanship in 2012 and preliminary contacts were established. The Steering Committee followed up under the Canadian and the UK Chairmanship, leading to the visit in January 2015.

It was the first IHRA country visit to Finland since the country became a full member of IHRA in 2010. The visit coincided with the International Holocaust Remembrance Day and the 70th Anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The program (annex 1) involved a variety of target groups including meetings with high-level governmental representatives such as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, high-ranking ministry officials, diplomats and civil servants and civil society representatives such as community leaders, university personnel, teachers, students and pupils. The IHRA delegation was accompanied by Kristina Kaihari (FNBE) and Ambassador Rauno Merisaari (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) throughout the programme.

The overall objectives were:

- Strengthening cooperation between the Finnish Delegation, the Advisor to the IHRA and the Permanent Office
- Gaining an overview of Holocaust education, remembrance and research activities in Finland
- Raising awareness and sharing best practices on Holocaust Memorial activities and strategies for combatting antisemitism

- Providing political decision-makers with a detailed and nuanced understanding of the role of IHRA
- Discussing strategies to increase the active involvement and the visibility of Finland within IHRA

Holocaust Remembrance Event at the Helsinki Synagogue

Finland’s main Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration event on 27 January was organised by the Finnish Holocaust Remembrance Association and took place at the Helsinki Synagogue. The ceremony was well attended by the President of the Republic, representatives of the government, members of parliament, ambassadors, and members of religious communities, among others.

Chairman of the Finnish Holocaust Remembrance Association, Mr. Matti Myllykoski, opened the [program](#). The keynote speech was held by the President of the Republic of Finland, Mr. Sauli Niinistö who emphasised that the Holocaust must never be forgotten and who took special note of the issue of present-day antisemitism. His speech can be read [here](#). Short addresses were then held by Mr. Yaron Nadbornik, Chairman of the Jewish Community of Finland and by the Ambassadors of Israel, Poland, and Germany to Finland. The Advisor to the IHRA, Prof. Steven Katz, and Dr. Kamila Dabrowska (Museum of the History of Polish Jews) held closing speeches. The Advisor to the IHRA spoke about the importance of Holocaust education. The commemoration event concluded with a reception.



The Academic Advisor to the IHRA, Prof. Steven Katz

Meetings with Educational Decision-Makers

On 26 January the program started with a round table meeting with the Finnish Delegation to IHRA at the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE). The meeting was attended by Mr. Jorma Kauppinen (FNBE), Ms. Kristina Kaihari (FNBE), Ambassador Rauno Merisaari (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Mr. Jari Aalto (Finnish History Teachers Association), Mr. Malte Gasche (University of Helsinki), Ms. Harriet Haras (Jewish Community of Helsinki), Ms. Johanna Laaja (Peace Education Institute), Mr. Anssi Pirttijärvi (Ministry of Education and Culture), Mr. Oula Silvennoinen (University of Helsinki), and Mr. Daniel Weintraub (Head of the Jewish School in Helsinki). Jorma Kauppinen, Director in the FNBE, is head of the national IHRA group which comprises additional governmental representatives and experts and which meets on a regular basis in order to discuss matters of concern related to the work of IHRA. It was noted that national meetings of IHRA delegations are highly



The Finnish Delegation to IHRA at the FNBE

appreciated and are seen as an example of good practices which should be shared with other member countries.

Mr. Kauppinen and Ms. Kaihari gave an introduction on Finland's educational system and its national curriculum. The FNBE is responsible for the development of national core curricula for pre-primary education, basic education, general upper secondary education and upper secondary vocational qualifications which determine core objectives and serve as guidelines for teaching. The decentralized education system provides autonomy to both local municipalities and teachers who prepare their own local curricula based on the FNBE guidelines. The Holocaust has been taught since the 1980s in Finnish schools as part of teaching European history of the 1930s and 1940s. Since 2010 the Holocaust is a compulsory subject in different classes including history, philosophy, and ethics or religion, at both basic education and upper secondary schools. In addition to that students learn about the Holocaust through a number of further educational activities such as special courses on the history of the Holocaust. The IHRA delegation noted the successes of Finland's education system which could serve as an example for good practices.

The round table continued with introduction of other projects on teaching and learning about the Holocaust in Finland. Daniel Weintraub stated that groups of students in the age of 14-18 visit the synagogue and the Jewish community on a regular basis. Harriet Haras added that further cooperation between Jewish and non-Jewish schools is planned with regard to Holocaust education.

Kristina Kaihari reported about the participation of Finnish teachers in training programs at Yad Vashem and about a cooperation project Finland started with other Nordic IHRA countries in order to share best practices on teacher training projects. With regard to higher education, Oula Silvennoinen explained that individual research is being carried out, however, neither Holocaust or Genocide Studies nor a Jewish Studies program are offered at Finnish universities.

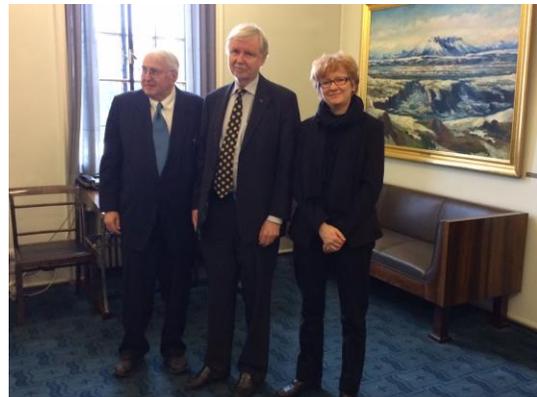
Johanna Laaja presented educational materials for primary and upper secondary schools that were compiled by the OSCE/ ODIHR and the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam in cooperation with several European countries. The Finnish edition was produced with the support of the Peace Education Institute, the Helsinki University, and the Ministry of Education. The [first booklet](#) deals with antisemitism, the Holocaust, and present-day discrimination. The [second booklet](#) deals with prejudices, discrimination and racism. Ms. Laaja noted that both booklets focus on a participatory approach and have been so well received that almost no copies of the second edition are available. It was hoped that funding for a third edition will be secured.

The Advisor to the IHRA and the Executive Secretary expressed their appreciation for the accomplishments and commitment to Holocaust and civic education. They encouraged the Finnish Delegation to IHRA to share best practices with other IHRA member countries and to put Finland's experiences to good use in IHRA's educational activities, such as the newly formed Professional Development Program. It was also recommended that IHRA's Grant Programme be considered for projects related to Holocaust education, remembrance and research, especially those co-funded by the government.

Meetings with Political Decision-Makers

The program on 26 January continued with a lunch meeting hosted by Ms. Kirsti Kauppi, Director General of the Political Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Ms. Kauppi informed the IHRA delegation about Finland's foreign policy and present-day challenges. With reference to Holocaust education, they discussed the significance of moral and civic education in countries that were historically and geographically less involved in the Holocaust than other countries. The Advisor to the IHRA drew attention to the fact that the Head of Delegation of Finland is the local Ambassador of the IHRA's Chairmanship country. He noted that communication within the Finnish Delegation functions well since the Deputy Head of Delegation, Kristina Kaihari, attends all IHRA meetings. However, with regard to continuity IHRA would benefit from a Head of Delegation that also attends more than one year's meetings.

On 27 January the IHRA delegation had the pleasure of meeting the Foreign Minister of Finland, Mr. Erkki Tuomioja, at the House of Parliament to discuss the importance of Holocaust education and remembrance. The Advisor to the IHRA and the Executive Secretary introduced the role of the IHRA, its member and observer countries and current challenges. Mr. Tuomioja noted that Finland together with Turkey initiated the United Nations program "Friends of Mediation". He expressed special interest in the topics of Holocaust education, remembrance and research and accentuated the challenges of both historical revisionism and historical amnesia. The Advisor to the IHRA wished to make two suggestions: He encouraged Finland to consider the issue of continuity in its governmental representation at IHRA Plenary meetings and to consider taking over the Chairmanship or Co-Chairmanship with a neighboring country.



Erkki Tuomioja, Foreign Minister of Finland
with Prof. Steven Katz and Dr Kathrin Mever

The program concluded on 28 January with a meeting with the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Mr. Ilkka Kanerva. Further participants were the following Members of Parliament: Jouko Jääskeläinen (Christian Democrats), Mika Niikko (True Finns), Peter Östman (Christian Democrats) and Ismo Soukola (True Finns). The Advisor to the IHRA and the Executive Secretary explained the main objectives of the delegation's visit to Finland and referred to the details of the IHRA, its working structure and outreach activities. Mr. Kanerva led the question and answer session on the topic of strengthening the cooperation between the OSCE and IHRA. The Executive Secretary emphasized the importance of the collaboration with OSCE/ODIHR in combating antisemitism. The Advisor to the IHRA reported on previous meetings highlighting the issue of rising antisemitism and the importance of Holocaust education courses. Ambassador Merisaari noted that Finland will participate in IHRA's country report mechanism as a reviewing country in 2015 and will be reviewed in 2017.

Meetings with Jewish Community and Schools

On 26 January the IHRA delegation accompanied by Rony Smolar, representative of the Jewish community, visited the Memorial to the Deported Jewish Refugees in the Park of Observatory Hill of Helsinki. The monument was erected in 2000 in memory of eight Jewish refugees who were handed over to the Gestapo by Finnish authorities in 1942 and murdered at the concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau.



Prof. Steven Katz with Rony Smolar (Jewish Community of Helsinki)

Afterwards the IHRA delegation visited the Jewish School and Society of Helsinki which was founded in 1918 and met with a group of the overall about 90 students and 20 teachers to learn



Mr. Daniel Weintraub, Head of the Jewish School of Helsinki

about the curriculum and the school's experiences. Mr. Daniel Weintraub, Head of the Jewish School of Helsinki, introduced a power point presentation on Holocaust education and remembrance which will be shared with the association of history teachers in Finland to be used in other schools. The visit included a meeting with Yaron Nadbornik, Chair of the Jewish Community in Helsinki, who underlined the rise of antisemitic incidents and referred to security measures the Jewish Community is in need of.

The following day the IHRA delegation visited the Kallio Upper Secondary School in Helsinki and met with Ms. Niina Vantanen and Ms Anne Mattsson, Teachers of history and Social Studies, and some of their students to learn about special courses on the history of the Holocaust that are offered at the school since three years. These special courses are attended by about 30 students and include a trip to the Auschwitz State Museum and Memorial. Students reported on the program and shared their experiences. It was obvious to the IHRA delegation how much impact these courses had on the students.



School Visit at Kallio Upper Secondary School in Helsinki

The teachers noted that due to budgetary restraints all special courses, among them the special course on the history of the Holocaust in which many students take an interest in, will be cancelled next year. It was hoped that funding will be secured again in the future.

Academic Symposium

The program continued with a symposium on the “70th Anniversary of the Liberation of the Concentration Camp Auschwitz – Holocaust, Remembrance and Education” at the Finnish National Museum Auditorium organized by the Finnish Holocaust Remembrance Association. Speakers included Dr. Kamila Dabrowska (Museum of the History of the Polish Jews), Prof. Steven Katz (Advisor to the IHRA), Dr. Oula Silvennoinen (Helsinki University and member of the Finnish Delegation to IHRA), and Mia Matilainen (University of Helsinki). Prof. Steven Katz spoke about different forms of Jewish resistance. The academic lectures on the history of the Holocaust, the role of Finland during the World War II and Holocaust education were followed by a discussion.

Communication and Visibility

The Holocaust Memorial Day national and international activities received a good level of news coverage. Several articles including interviews with survivors and members of the Jewish community were published in newspapers including an Helsingin Sanomat [article](#) on 24 January, an Helsingin Sanomat [article](#) on 26 January, an Iltalehti [article](#) on 27 January, and an Verkkouutiset [article](#) on 27 January.

The commemoration event on 27 January was broadcasted on television. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland had issued a [press release](#) informing about the commemoration event at the Synagogue of Helsinki, the visit of the IHRA’s delegation, and about Finland’s reaffirmation to the Stockholm Declaration. A news article was published on the IHRA [website](#) and the social media tool [Twitter](#) was used to inform about the program.

Conclusion

The program provided a comprehensive overview of the different activities in the fields of Holocaust education, remembrance and research. The IHRA delegation was deeply impressed by the efforts and by the attention that the highest political level gives to the topic of teaching and learning about the Holocaust. Although surveys show that antisemitism in Finland is among the lowest in Europe, political stakeholders pay a great deal of attention to combating antisemitism. The IHRA delegation was impressed by the successes of Finland’s educational system and therefore hopes that the Finnish delegation will share its experience with other countries and delegations.

Annex 1: Program



FINNISH NATIONAL
BOARD OF EDUCATION

Visit programme to Finland by IHRA Steering committee on Holocaust Memorial Days

25 – 28 January 2015

IHRA-delegation Professor Steven Katz, Advisor to IHRA
Ms Kathrin Meyer, Executive Secretary
Ms Julana Bredtmann, Project Assistant

Sunday 25.1.2014

Arrival of the visitors

19.00 Meeting at the reception of hotel Kämp
Dinner, hosted by **Mr Rauno Merisaari**, Human Rights Ambassador,
Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Monday 26 January

09.45 Depart hotel, accompanied by Ms Kristina Kaihari

10.00 – 11.30 Welcome coffee and Round Table meeting on Holocaust Education and
Remembrance in Finland at the Finnish National Board of Education
with the Finnish IHRA-working group
Mr Jorma Kauppinen, Director and **Ms Kristina Kaihari**,
Counsellor of Education, General Education Division, FNBE
Address: Hakaniemenranta 6, Helsinki

12.00 – 14.00 Lunch and meeting at restaurant NOKKA, hosted by **Ms Kirsti Kauppi**,
Director General, Political department, Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Address: Kanavaranta 7, Helsinki

14.30 – 16.00 Short visit at the Memorial to the Deported Jewish Refugees in the Park of
Observatory Hill of Helsinki (Tähtitorninmäki)
Visit at the Jewish School and Society of Helsinki
Mr Daniel Weintraub, Head of the Jewish School of Helsinki

Return to hotel

18.15 Depart hotel, accompanied by Kristina Kaihari

18.30 Dinner at the Government Banquet Hall
Eteläesplanadi 6
offered by **Ms Anita Lehtikoinen**, Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Education and Culture

Tuesday 27 January

- 08.45 Depart hotel, accompanied by Mr Anssi Pirttijärvi
- 09.00 – 11.00 School Visit, Teaching about Holocaust in Finnish Schools
Kallio Upper Secondary School
Ms Niina Vántänen and Ms Anne Mattsson, Teachers of history and Social Studies and students
Address: Porthaninkatu 15, Helsinki
- 11.00 – 11.30 Lunch at school
- Return to hotel
- 12.45 Depart hotel, accompanied by Mr Rauno Merisaari
- 13.15 – 13.45 Meeting with **Mr Erkki Tuomioja**, Foreign Minister of Finland
Venue: House of the Parliament
Mannerheimintie 30
- 14.00 – 16.15 **A Symposium on the 70th Anniversary of the Liberation of the Concentration Camp Auschwitz – Holocaust, Remembrance and Education**,
Finnish Holocaust Remembrance Association in cooperation with IHRA
Finnish National Museum Auditorium
Address: Mannerheimintie 34
- 17.30 Arrival to the Synagogue of Helsinki
- 18.00 **Holocaust Memorial Day Remembrance Event**
Keynote speech, **Mr Sauli Niinistö**, President of Finland
Synagogue of Helsinki
Address: Malminkatu 26, Helsinki
- Reception/Dinner immediately after the Remembrance Event
The Jewish Community of Helsinki

Wednesday 28 January

- 08.40 Depart hotel, accompanied by Mr Rauno Merisaari
- 09.00 – 11.00 Visit to the Finnish Parliament,
hosted by **Mr Ilkka Kanerva**, MP,
President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
Venue: House of the Parliament
Mannerheimintie 30, Helsinki
- 12.00 – 13.30 Lunch, discussions and reflections
hosted by **Mr Jorma Kauppinen**, Director, FNBE
- Closing the visit