



International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

Multi-Year Work Plan: Holocaust Memorial Days Report on the IHRA Visit to Hungary and Poland¹

April 15-22, 2013

Preamble

Months of correspondence and negotiations culminated in a high-level official visit by a delegation from the IHRA to Hungary and Poland, April 15-22, 2013. The delegation consisted of IHRA Canadian Chair, Dr. Mario Silva; Advisor to the IHRA, Dr. Steven T. Katz; and IHRA Executive Secretary, Dr. Kathrin Meyer. The purpose of the visit was to use national Holocaust Memorial Days as a timely chance to:

- interact with civil society meet diplomats and policymakers
- further Holocaust awareness on the national and local levels
- buttress support for the delegations of these two IHRA member countries and
- promote the IHRA's work.

Stage II of Phase I of the multi-year work plan of the IHRA Steering Committee on Holocaust Memorial Days was culminated in this visit.

Background

As noted above, this programming was originally initiated by the IHRA's steering committee on Holocaust Memorial Days under the multi-year work plan. During meetings of the IHRA in December 2012, the Hungarian delegation indicated a serious interest in working with the steering committee in April 2013, noting that this initiative would potentially be a welcome opportunity for all involved. After this initial discussion, the IHRA steering committee on Holocaust Memorial Days followed up with representatives from the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in an effort to explore possible avenues of cooperation. Discussions regarding the visit began in December 2012 and continued until spring. The IHRA Chair also conducted a Chair's visit in conjunction with the program of the MYWP Holocaust Memorial Days Steering Committee, thereby enhancing its visibility.

¹ This report has been prepared by the Steering Committee based on input from the Advisor to the IHRA, the Permanent Office, and the delegation of Hungary.

Hungary observes April 16, the date on which the government began to force Jewish people into ghettos, as its national Holocaust Memorial Day. Since Poland observes April 19, the date of the beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising as its national Holocaust Memorial Day, the IHRA steering committee also viewed this as an opportunity to put together a program in Poland as well.

Summary of Visit to Hungary

The Hungarian government organized and coordinated the visit, including transportation, logistics, and press coverage for an intense schedule from April 15-17, 2013. During its visit, the IHRA delegation spoke with members of the government about the importance of Holocaust remembrance, Holocaust education in the national curriculum, and about Holocaust denial and antisemitism, which is of concern to all IHRA member countries and increasing worldwide. The IHRA representatives experienced an open exchange about the activities of the Hungarian Holocaust 2014 Memorial Committee, which will mark the 70th anniversary of the deportations of Jews from Hungary during World War II, and Hungary's interest in assuming the Chairmanship in 2015. The government stressed the fact that they are hoping to create continuity, momentum, and awareness throughout Hungary by holding the memorial year of events in 2014 followed by the Chairmanship in 2015. The Hungarian candidacy therefore has the full support of all governmental levels and agencies..

The visit began with a meeting with the President and CEO of MAZSIHISZ (Alliance of Hungarian Jewish Faith Communes), followed by a meeting with the Hungarian Head and Deputy Head of Delegation, Mr. Gergely Pröhle and Ms. Komáromy. As part of its visit, on Tuesday morning, April 16th, the delegation traveled outside of Budapest to visit a Calvinist school founded in 1723 in Hódmezővásárhely. The school put on an impressive Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration (80 persons attended) that was followed by a municipal commemoration in which approximately 100 people took part. The second official ceremony in Hódmezővásárhely included a keynote speech by the IHRA Chair, as well as a speech by the Vice-Mayor, who hosted a lunch afterwards. As part of the team's interaction with approximately 30 pupils, the Advisor to the IHRA gave a talk on non-Jewish individuals who had the courage to help save Jewish lives during the Holocaust.

During the afternoon of Tuesday, April 16th, the IHRA delegation was invited to participate in the official National Holocaust Day Commemoration in Budapest that was organized by the Holocaust Memorial Centre. As part of the official program, the Advisor to the IHRA had the opportunity to give a talk on the significance of Holocaust education. Approximately 200 people attended this Holocaust Memorial Day event, including a number of senior governmental officials such as the Foreign Minister. A candlelight commemorative event at the memorial "Shoes on the Danube" went on all evening, during which several hundred people came by the memorial to light candles. .

The press coverage of the National Memorial Day and the IHRA delegation's visit was impressive and far-reaching. The IHRA Chair was interviewed by a national TV station and the Hungarian news agency MTI issued a detailed article on the speeches in Hódmezővásárhely. Two large newspapers also published articles about the Hódmezővásárhely speeches in their editions, and the

commemoration event at the Holocaust Documentation Center, which included Professor Katz's speech, was broadcast live on Duna Televízió. The government of Hungary also established a special website for the National Memorial Day, which is also available in English.

On the final day in Budapest, a number of high-level political meetings were held to discuss IHRA business. The first meeting was with Under-Secretary of State Mr. Péter Mikecz and Chief Advisor for Holocaust Remembrance Issues Mr. Zsigmond Perényi at the Prime Minister's office. The IHRA representatives were pleased to learn that events planned by the Hungarian Holocaust 2014 Memorial Committee will be taking place throughout the entire year of 2014 and the general importance the Prime Minister gives to Holocaust remembrance. The IHRA delegation made a visit to the Parliament before meeting with Mr. József Kaposi, Director General of the Institute for Educational Research and Development (OFI). OFI is responsible for creating the new Hungarian national curriculum and had previously consulted with Yad Vashem on Hungarian school textbooks. In follow-up to this meeting, the OFI sent the IHRA Permanent Secretariat in Berlin a nine-page document outlining proposed changes to their school curriculum. The Chief Advisor to the Prime Minister, with whom the IHRA representatives also met, was also in contact via letter after the visit to confirm that the suggestions regarding Holocaust education and remembrance will be taken into account in the secondary school curricula for the academic year 2013-2014. The final meetings were held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with Deputy Head of Delegation Ms. Andrea Komáromy and Secretary of State Mr. Zsolt Németh.

The IHRA representatives were highly appreciative of the impressive program during their visit to Hungary. They had the opportunity to hold fruitful and open discussions during their meetings and were assured of the seriousness with which the Hungarian government regards these issues.

Summary of Visit to Poland

On Thursday, April 18, 2013, the IHRA delegation continued to Warsaw for a program organized with the assistance of the Polish Deputy Head of Delegation. The IHRA representatives met with the Deputy Foreign Minister of Poland, Jerzy Pomianowski, together with Head of Delegation Krzysztof Olendzki and Deputy Head of Delegation Sebastian Rejak. The conversation focused on current activities and the importance given to Holocaust remembrance in Poland. The meeting was fruitful and several proposals for expanding cooperation between Poland and the IHRA were discussed.

Thursday night, April 18th and Friday, April 19th, the IHRA delegation was invited to all the activities that were taking place in connection with the 70th Commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. The ceremonies and other events were appropriately solemn and impressive. The main event was held in the former ghetto and included a visit to the significant new Museum of the History of Polish Jews that is scheduled to open in the spring of 2014. As part of the visit, the Advisor to the IHRA gave a lecture at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw on Thursday, April 18 2013. All in all, approximately 30 people attended this program.

On Sunday, April 20th, the Advisor to the IHRA went to Krakow. There he was greeted by members of the Polish delegation to the IHRA and gave a lecture at the Galician Jewish Museum on Monday, April 22, 2013. The lecture was organized by several local universities and other partners and had a sizeable audience, mainly composed of university students.

Engagement with Audiences

Approximate Number of People Engaged with in Hungary: 470 persons

Approximate Number of People Engaged with in Poland: 100 persons

Total Number reached in Both IHRA Member States: 570 persons

Analysis and Recommendations

Holocaust Memorial Days, often marked by different IHRA member states during different times during the calendar year, clearly do provide opportunities for the IHRA to further its goals and promote the principles of the Stockholm Declaration. On the basis of this visit in April, and the one arranged in late January, it is clear that the multi-year work plan of the IHRA Steering Committee on Holocaust Memorial Days has raised the profile of the IHRA in most of the countries visited. It should be noted that prior to the launching of the IHRA multi-year plan, IHRA teams had usually never officially taken part in member states' Holocaust Remembrance Day programming. The ITT program that took place in January 2011 focused on IHRA observer countries. In addition, significant media coverage to the work of the IHRA was given in Hungary as a result of this visit.

Questions remain concerning the coordination of these visits in IHRA member countries. While some member countries expressed their concerns during previous discussions whether this program would have a long-lasting impact, those delegations whose countries have been visited expressed their gratitude to the international IHRA team for enabling their organizations and governments to raise the profile of their national events. In light of this situation, IHRA visits should be well planned in advance in order to determine whether the goals of this IHRA outreach programming on Holocaust Memorial Days can be realistically achieved.

It is recommended that the steering committee seriously consider options about how to work with IHRA permanent observers, liaison, and observer countries in the future as well as with countries outside of the IHRA. The IHRA is responsible for raising its own profile. Clearly, if the IHRA does not promote its own work and cooperate with member states and other countries, it will not be carrying out its mission statement. Ultimately the small amount of money invested in this Holocaust Memorial Day project has promoted the work of the IHRA on a number of planes.

Appendix I.

Program of the IHRA Delegation in Hungary, April 15-17, 2013

April 15, 2013

Airport transfers provided by the Canadian Embassy

- 17.40 Start from the Canadian Embassy (shuttle bus)
- 18.00 Meeting with the President of MAZSISZ, Mr Péter Feldmájer and Mr Gusztáv Zoltai, CEO of MAZSIHISZ
- 18.45 Transfer to the restaurant
- 19.00 Dinner hosted by Under-Secretary of State Mr Gergely Próhle at the Rosenstein Restaurant (Mr Silva, Mr Katz, Ms Meyer, Mr Próhle, Ms Komaromy and Mr Somogyi)
- 21.00 Transfer to the hotel

April 16, 2013 – Holocaust Memorial Day

- 07.30 Travelling to Hódmezővásárhely (Le Meridien),
- 09.30-10.00 Welcome by the vice-Mayor of Hódmezővásárhely
- 10.00 First ceremony, opened by Mr Csaba Hende, Minister of Defense
- 11.00 Wreath laying (1. Government, 2. Municipality, 3. IHRA, 4. School)
- 11.00-11.30 Reception
- 11.00 Example of history lessons (we will arrive during the course of lessons)
- 11.50 Speech by Professor Katz before students
- 12.00 Official ceremony, address by Mr Peter Kószó, Vice-Mayor
- 12.20 Keynote speech by Dr. Mario Silva, IHRA Chair
- 13.00 Lunch, hosted by the city of Hódmezővásárhely
- 14.30 Transfer back to Budapest
- 17.00 Ceremony at the Holocaust Memorial Centre in Budapest
- 17.00 National Anthem (Start of ceremony)
- 17.05 Opening speech by Professor Szabolcs Szita
- 17.15 As part of the event, extracts will be read out from the best essays submitted in response to the essay competition entitled „Losses of Hungarian culture” invited by the Memorial Centre.

- 17.25 Budapest Klezmer Band
- 17.30 The temporary exhibition entitled “Memories-Images: Unforgettable life stories from the 20th century”. The exhibition will be opened by Monika Balatoni, Minister of State for Public Diplomacy and Relations at the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice.
- 17.40 Award giving ceremony – The 2013 Wiesenthal Awards will be presented
- 17.50 Budapest Klezmer Band
- 17.55 Memorial speech of Professor Katz
- 18.05 At the memorial service, Péter Joel Tótha, senior field rabbi will say a prayer for the deceased at the Memorial Wall of Victims, following which attendees will pay tribute to the memory of the victims by lighting candles and placing stones of remembrance.
- 19.00 Ceremony at the “Shoes on the Danube” Memorial site at the Danube to the victims of the Holocaust (candle-lightning)
- 20.00 Transfer to the Hotel

April 17, 2013

- 08.15 Transfer from the Hotel to the Parliament
- 08.30 Meeting at the Prime Minister’s Office with Under-Secretary of State Mr Péter Mikecz and Mr Zsigmond Perényi, chief advisor for Holocaust remembrance issues
- 09.30 Visit of the Parliament
- 10.15 Meeting with Mr József Kaposi, Director General of the Institute for Educational Research and Development (OFI)
- 11.15 Transfer to the MFA
- 11.30 Meeting with Ms Andrea Komaromy, Head of Department
- 12.15 Meeting with Mr Zsolt Németh, Secretary of State
- 12.45 Transfer and Meetings Organized by the Canadian Embassy
- 20.00 Departure to Poland

Appendix II.

Examples of Press Coverage and Promotional Materials

<http://www.holocaustremembrance.com/media-room/image-galleries/ihra-visit-hungary>

<http://www.holocaustremembrance.com/media-room/image-galleries/ihra-visit-poland>

The government of Hungary established a special website for Holocaust Remembrance Day, also available in English: <http://holokausztalozatai.kormany.hu/>

The Hungarian news agency MTI issued a detailed piece of news on the speech of the Chair made in Hódmezővásárhely:

http://www.hirado.hu/Hirek/2013/04/16/15/Nemzetkozi_Holokauszt_Emlekezesi_Szovetseg_kuzdeni_kell_az_antiszemitizmus.aspx

Two articles published on 17 April: One in the daily „Magyar Nemzet” the other in the daily „Népszava” - both highlighting the speech of the Chair of the IHRA.

The commemoration event (and the speech of Professor Steven Katz) organized in the Holocaust Documentation Center was broadcasted live on Duna Televízió.

On the website of the Holocaust Documentation Center

<http://www.hdke.hu/sajtoszoba/rolunk-irtak/wiesenthal-dij-ket-pedagogusnak-es-kiallitas-emlek-kepek-cimmel> you will find - among others – a picture of Professor Katz making his speech.