



International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

**Address by IHRA Chair, Ambassador Benno Böttig at the Reception  
by Geneva Authorities, Geneva Plenary.**

**28 June 2017**

Dear President of the State Council of the Republic and canton of Geneva

Dear ladies and dear gentlemen,

Dear delegates and friends

It is an honour for Switzerland, and for me personally, to be chairing the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance this year.

2017 is a very important year for the IHRA with the development and adoption of its very first strategy. I really hope that the “esprit de Genève” inspires our work.

I would like to express my gratitude to the government of the canton of Geneva for its generosity towards the IHRA for hosting us in this beautiful place.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance is a unique organisation which unites experts and governmental representatives. Here, fruitful dialogue and knowledge exchange have the aim to anchor the teaching and the commemoration of the Holocaust within our societies and to keep the subject alive for future generations.

Professor Steven Katz, Adviser to the IHRA; has written that the serious study and teaching of the Holocaust is “*both, a historical necessity and a sign of respect to the truth.*” The mission of the IHRA is to strengthen, advance and promote Holocaust research remembrance and research worldwide. Switzerland fully supports these aims and has defined “education” and “youth” as two priorities during Swiss IHRA chairmanship.

IHRA's mission – and fully supported by Switzerland as well - is also to know and tell the truth so that we are able to shape a future world that continues to fight the antisemitism, xenophobia, genocide or Holocaust denial and distortion that still threaten our societies.

During this year of the IHRA chairmanship, Switzerland will chair two Plenary Meetings – the one taking place now, and the other one in Bern this November. Hosting one of the plenary meetings in Geneva was an obvious choice for three reasons:

Firstly, as a canton that shares more borders with France than with Switzerland, Geneva was in a particular situation during the Second World War. Many refugees were fleeing occupied France and were able to enter Geneva. Others, however, were turned away, sometimes due to border officers who interpreted the Federal rules much more strictly than they had been intended. Thus wartime Geneva is an example for the complexity of the Swiss position among Europe and of its refugee policy.

Secondly, the Canton of Geneva is also strongly committed to upholding the memory of the Holocaust. For the last 14 years, Geneva has assumed a leading role in its yearly commemorations on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January, the International Day for the Commemoration of the Victims of the Holocaust.

Finally, the Canton and the city of Geneva are the host to many international organizations and NGOs which fight discrimination, which provide and have provided for refugees all over the world and which promote peace and human rights for each and every human being.

Later in this week, we will have the pleasure of getting to know the two most important international organizations in Geneva. We will visit the archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and of the former League of Nations archives hosted at the United Nations Offices at Geneva.

And we thank again, the State Council and its president, Monsieur François Longchamp for receiving us, the IHRA delegates, tonight.