



**Intervento della Presidenza Italiana IHRA
al Consiglio permanente dell'OSCE**

Vienna, 31 gennaio 2019

Ho il piacere di leggere un testo inviatomi dall'attuale Presidente della "International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance", S.E. l'Ambasciatore Sandro De Bernardin, che non è potuto essere qui con noi oggi a causa di concomitanti impegni a New York legati alle celebrazioni della Giornata della Memoria.

QUOTE

«Mister Chairperson,
Excellencies,

I thank the Slovak Chairmanship-in-Office for inviting me, in my capacity as current Chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, to take the floor before this Permanent Council.

Unfortunately, my physical presence in Vienna today was prevented by other institutional commitments that I had previously accepted. So, I thank Ambassador Azzoni for kindly accepting to convey to you my remarks, that come almost at the end of the year of my tenure.

First of all, allow me to recall what the IHRA is. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance is an intergovernmental body which unites governments and experts to strengthen, advance and promote Holocaust education, remembrance and research worldwide.

To this end – and operating by consensus – the IHRA

- (a) sets expectations for action by each one of its Members
- (b) identifies best practices, conducive to the achievement of shared goals
- (c) follows the situation in each Member country.

I am gratified by the fact that, during the Italian Chairmanship, Bulgaria acquired the status of full member of our Organization. Now the Alliance counts 32 member countries. Ideally, by next year Portugal too will complete the process towards full membership. And Australia has announced her will to engage in the same path soon.

Mister Chairman,

In “*If This Is a Man*” – the book he wrote about his tragic experience in Birkenau – the Italian author Primo Levi reports on a recurrent nightmare of deportees: to survive, to go back home, to tell their stories and to not be believed.

That nightmare often came true. And even today, in many countries, doubts are cast on the events of the Holocaust.

As a matter of fact, the Italian Chairmanship of the IHRA began its work in times of growing concern for the renewed threats to the physical security of Jewish communities in a number of European countries, and the spreading of new forms of antisemitism linked to the existence of the State of Israel.

Equally worrying is – in our eyes – the wave of intolerance against those who are seen as “aliens”. They are people “different” from the traditional European culture. They are seen as a nuisance because, in their quest for a safer and better life, they want to enter Europe. The circumstances surrounding the current refugee situation are notably different from the persecution of Jews and other victims before, during and after the Holocaust; nonetheless, there are parallels between the treatment of refugees then and now, particularly regarding the closing of borders, the rise of xenophobia and the use of de-humanizing language.

In taking over the IHRA Chair last March I set, as main goals for my tenure, the improvement of the performance of the IHRA in

1. coping with its institutional tasks in the field of Holocaust research and education
2. denouncing and fighting modern manifestations of antisemitism
3. contributing to unveiling and countering any form of social discrimination.

This last point prompted the Italian Chair to organize – last 12 November in the venue of the Shoah Memorial in Milan – an international conference on Hate Speech. The proceedings of this conference will be published soon, and made available to member countries.

Another international conference was convened by the Italian Chair on 27 May, relating to the issue of legal discrimination. Since Year 2018 marked the 80th anniversary of Italian racial laws, we deemed it appropriate to stimulate a reflection

on political premises and modalities of the development of discriminatory regulations.

In the same vein, the IHRA Academic Working Group has begun the first systematic survey of such laws and regulations in Europe before World War II. Once this survey is completed, I expect it also to cast an interesting light on phenomena that are taking place nowadays.

So, IHRA members pledged their commitment to combat all forms of discrimination. But, among all forms, antisemitism has historical and phenomonic peculiarities, that have to be kept in mind if we wish to effectively fight this plague. Hence the importance of the *working definition of antisemitism*, that the IHRA adopted by consensus in 2016 and which has been – since then – adopted nationally by a number of countries. This definition provides educators, security apparatuses and the judiciary with sound references in coping with their tasks.

In order to combat antisemitism effectively, it is important to have clarity about what antisemitism is and how it may manifest itself. The IHRA tool captures antisemitism in its developmental stages and mutations, reflects current realities and is of practical use. It seeks to educate and inspires dialogue on forms of antisemitism: from antisemitism that emerges from hateful intent to unconscious forms of discrimination, as well as subsequent antisemitic actions that deny rights and/ or a feeling of safety and security to Jews or people identified as Jews.

In the course of the two Plenary Assemblies - held respectively at the end of May and the end of September 2018 - the IHRA was gratified by the exchange of ideas and experiences with its Permanent International Partners, among which the OSCE and the ODIHR play a prominent role.

And I take this opportunity to express my satisfaction for having been invited to contribute to the Conference on Combatting Antisemitism, organized by the then OSCE Chairmanship in Rome last year. I am also happy to announce that Mr. Robert Williams, the current Chair of the IHRA Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial, will be a speaker during the incoming Conference on Combatting Antisemitism organized by the Slovak OSCE Chairmanship in Bratislava.

We commend these initiatives. Our organizations rely on different memberships, tools and competences. But we work to the same end: a peaceful and dignified world. We are not competing commercial brands. We have to act in synergy in order to promote and advance human rights.

A peculiar responsibility for the IHRA is to increase its effectiveness in honoring its *raison d'être*, that is Holocaust Remembrance. Our discussions along the past year identified a number of crucial challenges:

- (a) the distortion of historical narrative, that today is possibly more insidious than the flat denial of the Holocaust
- (b) the trivialization of antisemitic behaviours, often driven by ignorance
- (c) the indifference of many bystanders, who do not denounce verbal aggressions that are the first step down the slippery slope leading to violence
- (d) the under-reporting of cases of antisemitism which is linked to, on the one hand, the factors I just mentioned and, on the other, inadequate sensitivity and competence of public officials in charge
- (e) the multiplier effect of the web: as matter of fact, social platforms allocate scarce resources to the quick removal of sites inciting to hate.

Meeting such crucial challenges is not an ordinary task. It is not a task that can be tackled in a perfunctory way. It requires a pro-active stand. Affirmative action is needed before we are drawn in a democratic emergency. This action should stem from a joint commitment of governments and civil society, of public officials and experts, of Jews and non-Jews.

The IHRA provides a unique platform for the interaction of all these different actors.

Since 2016 the IHRA has developed a reflection on how to make its performance more adequate to the new challenges.

In particular, our Organization engaged in a process meant to streamline its working structure and to better focus its outputs.

As a result, we decided to concentrate our projects in two main conceptual areas, that are

- One, safeguarding the record: that is to ensure that testimonies and material evidence of the Holocaust reach new generations
- Two, combatting distortion: that is to prevent the false narrative and trivialization of what happened.

Indeed, these are the areas where the unique competence of the IHRA can make a difference, providing a crucial contribution to the efforts of the International community against the oblivion and the repetition of the horrors of the Holocaust.

So far our experts have been working according to a thematic repartition of competences: historical research, education, museums, conservation of sites. Now they are called to work in an interdisciplinary mode, in projects with specific aims and of political relevance.

Excellencies,

Next year will mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz/Birkenau camps and of the end of World War II. But also the 20th anniversary of the Stockholm Declaration, the founding document of the IHRA.

Our Member countries felt that this anniversary would offer a good opportunity to solemnly reaffirm the principles that moved our commitment, also in the light of the evolution of our societies in the latest years. So, following a decision taken by our last Plenary Assembly, we have begun working on how this opportunity could be taken advantage of.

I wish to my successor - Ambassador Georges Santer, who will take over the responsibility of the Chair on 5 March on behalf of Luxembourg - the best success in achieving this work.

I said that we feel the need to solemnly reaffirm our founding principles. I would add that the first of these principles, from which all the others stem, is “to stand up for the truth”.

This means to be watchful of all attempts to repress free academic research, or to re-write history, or to overlook hidden parts of history, or to refuse to recognize those parts of history that bother us. This means to be aware that, in the hidden parts of history, monsters can make their nest from where they can come back.

No country is exempt from this danger. No country has the magic formula to solve the problem. In the “global village” that Europe and the world have become, only international cooperation can provide a solution.

I am really grateful to you, Mister Chairperson, for offering me this floor today.

I am confident that the partnership between our two Organizations will further consolidate, and prove to be more and more fruitful.

Thank you for your attention».

END QUOTE

Con queste parole si conclude il messaggio dell’Ambasciatore De Bernardin.

Vi ringrazio per l’attenzione.