

Parliamentary Session, Bucharest

- It is a very great honour to be here today in front of such a distinguished audience to speak in my capacity as the British Chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. I thank the Romanian government for the kind invitation. This is neither an occasion nor a speech that I could have envisaged when I lived with my family for three years here in Bucharest in the 1970s.
- I should first like to take this opportunity to introduce IHRA. Established in 1998, IHRA is an intergovernmental body whose purpose is to strengthen the support and commitment of political and social leaders behind the need for Holocaust education, remembrance and research, on both a national and international level. It draws its mandate and its energy from the Declaration issued at the end of the International Forum on the Holocaust in Stockholm in 2000.
- IHRA currently has 31 full member countries, 5 (soon to be 7) formal observer countries, and 7 permanent international partner organizations.
- Unique to IHRA's structure is the fact that it brings together both government officials and NGOs, thereby connecting the political level and the leading experts in the field.
- With a dozen Working Groups and Committees, and several smaller initiatives, IHRA enjoys the active participation of an exceptional network of policy-makers, survivors, academics, educationalists, curators and other experienced experts in IHRA member and non-member countries.
- The expert level is meant to advise and bring content to the political level so that governmental representatives can implement policies and make political decisions on Holocaust-related matters on an informed basis.
- The cooperation and exchange between these two levels is the backbone of our organization. It is a particular pleasure to work with a strong and committed Romanian delegation.
- This historic session is indicative of the importance afforded to the topic of the Holocaust by the Romanian government.
- Since the end of the Second World War, Jewish communities and Jewish institutions have been involved in commemorating the Holocaust. We believe, however, that the Holocaust is not just a tragedy in Jewish history, but rather a tragedy of world history; the most extreme example of man's inhumanity to man and a challenge to the very foundations of modern civilization.
- Such commemorative work is not just the remit of a select few or of those groups directly affected by the tragedy of the Holocaust. The nearly 50

governments who attended the Stockholm Forum 15 years ago declared that the Holocaust was such a catastrophe, such a collapse of civilization that it must never be allowed to fade into history, but must remain at the forefront of our minds. And they said “With Humanity still scarred by genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, antisemitism and xenophobia, the international community shares a solemn responsibility to fight those evils.”

- The Holocaust has a universal message; it shows us what happens when democratic values break down, it shows us the horrors to which discrimination and prejudice can lead and it demonstrates why the dignity of all human beings is something which we must all strive to protect.
- The lessons learned from the Holocaust are of such irrefutable importance that they should remain forever seared in our collective memory and their commemoration should not be confined to any one sphere of society. We must all stand together.
- Material progress does not guarantee ethical progress. Hence the need for effective educational programmes.
- The Stockholm Declaration said: “We must strengthen the moral commitment of our peoples, and the political commitment of our governments, to ensure that future generations can understand the Holocaust and reflect on its consequences... Together we must uphold the terrible truth of the Holocaust against those who deny it”
- This statement highlights the essential responsibility of the political leaders in all our countries in this momentous task.
- Despite the progress that has been made, real concerns remain. We are witnessing increasing outbreaks of antisemitism and xenophobic violence as well as the use of highly inappropriate Holocaust comparisons by political leaders who should know better.
- These are scourges which must be fought and resisted not only by NGOs and civil society, but in the Parliaments and political fora of all our societies. None of us can tackle these problems alone.
- Romania has been a member of IHRA since 2004. In the last 10 years you have taken major steps in the field of Holocaust education, remembrance and research.
- The establishment of the Romanian National Holocaust Remembrance Day, on 9 October, marking the beginning of the deportations of Jews from Romania to Transnistria in 1942, as well as the state-funded Holocaust Memorial in Bucharest, where I attended a commemorative event this morning, are vital elements in commemorating the Romanian victims of the Holocaust.

- On an academic and educational level, the Wiesel Commission and the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania have a central role in revising the educational syllabus and textbooks to reflect an accurate history of the Holocaust in Romania.
- A Romanian Chairmanship of IHRA in 2016 will provide an excellent opportunity for the Romanian government and your national experts to work together to strengthen and further the great progress that has already been made.
- IHRA is not yet a name known everywhere but its mandate is one of universal importance. We hope that with the support of the Romanian government and your national experts we can find an even more prominent place for IHRA on the international stage.