

HOLOCAUST EDUCATION AND REMEMBRANCE: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

- **In the year 2000 nearly 50 governments gathered together in Stockholm to remind the world, in what has become known as the Stockholm Declaration, that the Holocaust was such a catastrophe, such a collapse of civilisation, that it should never be allowed to fade into history but must remain at the front of our minds. As a warning of what happened once and could happen again, unless we all stand firm against prejudice, antisemitism, racial intolerance and xenophobia.**
- **The full text is in front of you. The governments committed themselves to encouraging Holocaust education, remembrance and research; and to strengthening “the moral commitment of our peoples and the political commitment of our governments, to ensure that future generations can understand the causes of the Holocaust and reflect upon its consequences”.**
- **When it comes to mass atrocities there can be no competition in misery. Wherever they take place the human pain and loss is the same and cannot be compensated. The Holocaust is deeply imbedded in the cultural inheritance of European societies and is a central part too of the memory of the world, for there was hardly anywhere in the world that was not touched then or subsequently by those terrible events.**
- **In everything we do we have to factor in the fact that there was a time in the heartland of Europe, in the not so recent past, when our fellow human beings inflicted terrible treatment on their innocent neighbours. We have to plan for a time when we no longer have first-hand testimony to rebut the lies of the Holocaust deniers and reaffirm the truth of what happened.**

- **We have watched aghast as year after year, now in Iraq, Syria and West Africa, we see mass murder repeated.**
- **But the Holocaust stands out as the paradigm of genocide, the most extreme example we know. 6 million people killed as the culmination of a cold-blooded state policy to kill every last Jew, man, woman and child, wherever they lived on the planet: to exterminate a whole people.**
- **Sadly genocide is not unique, either in pre- or post-WWII times. The Holocaust was unprecedented in its scale and callous brutality and as the culmination of centuries of hatred and prejudice. It deserves therefore close study both for what it tells us about our own societies and for what it reveals about the human response under extreme pressure. The reason why we continue to study and teach what happened is because the Holocaust came out of the well-springs of European society. We saw a repetition in Bosnia. We can see all over Europe that the Roma and Sinti still endure persecution. We see that Antisemitism is on the rise in the parliaments, comedy shows and football terraces of several countries. It pervades the internet and it poisons the minds of the young.**
- **The atavistic urge to purge the world of people “not like us” is a terrible indictment of the human race. We saw it in the treatment of First Nations in the Americas and in the practice of slavery in Africa. We saw it in the French Revolution. We saw it practised by the fanatical supporters of Marxist-Leninism in Russia, in China and in Cambodia.**
- **We have seen it in the heat of battle in Bosnia, in Rwanda, in Sudan and now in West Africa. We see the same passions aroused across the Middle East, in the Muslim world, just as we saw it in the days of Partition in India. Just consider the attacks on Christian communities in Egypt, Syria and Pakistan. Each time we wake up late and wish we had acted sooner. Many people still fear that to relate the Holocaust to other genocides will dilute the focus on a unique horror. But the truth is that each succeeding atrocity constantly reinforces the sense that the Holocaust is until now the ultimate reminder of how bad things can get.**

- **And as we know, as we study the Holocaust, or indeed study the causes of both World Wars in the Twentieth Century, these events throw a long shadow down the years, from generation to generation. Whether or not we can ever come to terms with what happened and whether or not we can ever truly build a fire-break between past prejudice and the future I do not know. But what is surely clear, and this is my first proposition, is that if we do not face the facts, if we do not face up to what happened, if we suppress the truth, if we try to whitewash our responsibilities away, then the memory of that past and the guilt will continue to haunt us and our children.**
- **In February the United Kingdom took over the chairmanship of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, known as IHRA. I am the current Chair. IHRA grew out of that Stockholm Declaration and is an intergovernmental body, a political network of policy-makers, survivors, academics, educationalists, curators and non-governmental experts committed to furthering international cooperation on Holocaust education, remembrance and research; to fighting the evils of Holocaust denial and denigration; and to doing all they can to ward off any future genocide.**
- **As we work together we have to acknowledge how difficult and traumatic it often still is for people in many countries to face up to what actually happened, to acknowledge who were persecutors, who were victims, who were collaborators and who just stood by and did nothing, except perhaps steal the goods of those who were deported. We are all making journeys of historical discovery and national self-understanding as well as pilgrimages of sorrow and regret. But it has to be recognised that there is still a strong desire in a few countries to rewrite history, to whitewash the past by blaming the Nazis for everything and to evade national responsibility for the help so willingly given the Nazis during the deportations.**
- **The brochure on your table explains some of what we do. We are 31 countries, 5 observers, soon to be 7 with El Salvador and Albania. And we welcomed the International Tracing Service in May as our 7th permanent international partner. We meet in plenary session for a**

week twice a year. We have a vigorous outreach programme to Ukraine, Moldova and the Vatican. We hope to start working with Morocco, Australia and South Africa. There have been Holocaust teaching programmes in China for over ten years and I look forward to hearing more about the interest of other Asian countries. Interest may be picking up too in Africa and South America.

- My propositions to stimulate your discussions will address in turn the need for research, the fight against denial, the role of remembrance, the purpose of education, the link with other genocides and the lessons for genocide prevention.
- But first can I just try to ensure that we all understand what we are talking about. There are better historians in the room than I who may well want to correct me.
- The Holocaust Era is generally held to mean the years between 1933 and 1945 in Europe when the Nazis systematically sought to displace Jews and other undesirables (political opponents, criminals, intellectuals, trade unionists, homosexuals, gypsies, the handicapped) from the expanding German Reich and eventually determined to destroy the Jewish race entirely through exile, starvation, mass killings and extermination camps on an industrial scale. Scholars are showing that in the confusion after the War the agony of the Holocaust lasted later still than 1945.
- The years after WWI were politically and economically fragile. After Hitler came to power in 1933 he wanted to purify German society and restore its pride and unity. Jews were seen as a particular threat. They were progressively deprived of their civil rights. Their shops were boycotted; they were disbarred from the legal, medical and academic professions and from government service. They were persecuted, physically attacked, imprisoned, starved and murdered.
- At first Hitler's objective was to rid Germany of Jews and go on to defeat the Soviet Union which he believed was led by Jews and populated with a Slavic under-class. As his armies expanded into

eastern Europe of course the Germans found themselves taking on ever larger Jewish populations, and Polish and Slavic ones, all of whom had to be dispersed further east or killed if room was to be made for German colonisers.

- Increasing numbers in their tens and hundreds of thousands were shot in make-shift pits outside towns and villages. And millions were herded into ghettos and concentration and slave labour camps. A similar model applied to Western Europe.
- The army was followed by expert teams briefed to ransack the occupied lands and seize valuable property especially works of art. Good cultural artefacts were taken to Berlin and Linz. Degenerate ones, the Picassos and Matisses, were sold to fund the Nazi Party. There was a huge international trade in looted art throughout WWII.
- But having failed by the winter of 1941 to defeat the Soviet Union in the 12 weeks Hitler had originally planned, the Nazis found themselves not only in retreat but having to handle situations in Poland and the Western Soviet Union that they had not envisaged. Progress in eliminating the Jews was too slow for the Nazis when it had to be done one by one. And the action had to be taken not in the distant reaches of the Soviet Union, out of sight out of mind, but nearer established centres of Western civilization.
- In January 1942 the leading SS leader Reinhardt Heydrich announced to the Wannsee Conference in Berlin plans for the “final solution” to the Jewish problem. All Jews everywhere were to be herded through the ghettos and concentration and slave labour camps to extermination camps in the East ie Poland where they were gassed and killed in their millions, in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobobor and Treblinka
- The height of this murderous campaign, the epicentre of the Holocaust, was between August and November 1942, though the killings went on until the end of the war. And while millions were being deported to the extermination camps, millions more were being murdered in killing sites and mass graves on the edges of towns and villages.
- Even when it had already become clear that the Nazis would be defeated, even after the Normandy landings 70 years ago this month,

hundreds of thousands were being dispatched from Hungary to Auschwitz. By the end of the war some 6 million Jews and many millions of others had been killed by the Nazis. This was in a state-run campaign, and that is what makes the Holocaust so distinctive.

- In December 1942 the Allies, by then calling themselves the United Nations, issued the first collective expression of concern at reports of mass slaughter coming out of the war-torn continent of Europe. They condemned “this bestial policy of cold-blooded extremism in the strongest possible terms” and promised post-war retribution.
- In time Nazi leaders would be judged and condemned at Nuremburg and a host of other post-war trials in the Occupation Zones. And in time too the revulsion felt by the rest of the world led to an ever tighter net of international laws and human rights.
- But it was only many years after WWII formally ended that there came an end too to the misery of millions of displaced people languishing in the camps, the traumas faced by survivors who tried to go home to villages that no longer wanted them, the hostility towards millions of Germans who were kicked out of Eastern Europe regardless of whether they were new settlers or had lived in those parts for 400 years, or the slow opening up of the borders of Palestine.
- Why is the subject still so controversial?
- Part of the answer it seems to me is to be found in the collision of two rather different narratives about the Holocaust era. After WWII many survivors scattered around the world to rebuild their lives and put the awful experiences and compromises of the Holocaust Era behind them. The priority of the time was to unite against Joseph Stalin not brood over the damage caused by Adolph Hitler.
- Slowly however the historians put together a relatively clear account of how antisemitism grew in Germany and morphed into the Holocaust.
- But it was not until the late 1980s that increasing numbers of survivors nearing the end of their lives began speaking out about their personal experiences for fear that otherwise the harrowing, morally complicated truth about the Holocaust would be forgotten.

- At the same time another dramatic historical shift was taking place with the end of the Cold War and the fall of communism in 1989. This led to an opening up of the archives of Eastern Europe. And this coincided too with the war in post-Tito Yugoslavia and the reappearance of genocide on our European doorstep.
- This sparked an upsurge in interest in the Holocaust and fresh revelations, with the result that the 1990s saw ever more international conferences about the events of the Holocaust era, what to do with Nazi Gold, looted art, looted property, insurance policies etc leading to the international commitments in Stockholm and later Prague that I have already mentioned.
- But what emerged in eastern Europe was a rather different and more complex narrative which sought to make sense not only of the Holocaust but of the equally destructive actions of the Soviet Union and local communists in Poland and the Baltic States, in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine where many more millions lived and then died by Stalin's decrees during the Great Famine, the Great Terror and the wartime savagery with and against Germany.
- Few genocides occur out of the blue. Not many have such hundreds of centuries of hostility behind them as is the case with antisemitism. But it seems to me that there are six matters which warrant your attention.
- First, as I have said, the need for constant research to ensure that the facts are properly understood. That was my first proposition. This means opening up the archives, recording and preserving testimonies and treading very carefully to ensure that the reworking of history does not turn into the kind of historical revisionism which seeks to shift the blame inappropriately.
- Easier access to archives is a key IHRA priority. But our flagship project is to develop strategies to identify, preserve, protect and memorialise mass graves and killing sites in Eastern Europe. Ignoring the physical evidence will only encourage those who prefer to say that the Holocaust has been exaggerated.

- My second proposition is that through the work of educators and politicians we must resist the siren voices of denial, denigration and trivialisation. The leaflets in front of you spell out the Holocaust denial challenges facing IHRA. It took six years to agree this definition.
- My third proposition is that monuments, memorials, museums and annual ceremonies of remembrance are vital elements in ensuring that societies do face the historical truth. They can play a vital role as the firebreaks between the past and the future. Each year in the UK the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust stimulates over 2000 commemorative events across the UK each 27 January.
- My fourth proposition concerns education. It is not enough to talk emotionally about the Holocaust. Indeed some of the most popular movies, like the Boy in Striped Pyjamas, are poor guides to what happened. Our educators have to think hard why they are teaching it so that they can be clear about what they are teaching, to whom, when and how. IHRA, led by the UK, is putting big resources into assessing the impact of Holocaust Education
- The physical prevention of genocide must largely be the responsibility of governments working through established international institutions and in accordance with a strong growing consensus behind the Responsibility to Protect. It is not for IHRA to duplicate what other bodies are doing to stand against genocidal tendencies wherever and to whomever they occur. But there are lessons to be drawn from the Holocaust experience which could help our societies grapple with a phenomenon which is far too prevalent and which seems to grow with the size of our populations and the technological sophistication of our societies.
- So my fifth proposition is that the strongest barrier against prejudice is the ethical strength of a society. Values of tolerance and mutual understanding need to be inculcated into the young and reinforced throughout life. And they have to be based on a profound sense of history.
- Research provides an ever sounder basis for understanding the Holocaust. Remembrance reminds us of how fragile our societies can

be and that progress, modernity, intellectual achievement, technological advance and good intentions are no guarantee that darker instincts will not prevail. Education should give our societies the confidence to move forward in a humane and enlightened way.

- But material progress does not guarantee ethical progress. Hence the wisdom of constantly remembering and teaching the events of 75 years ago. For IHRA education is the key. We have supported hundreds of projects all over the world. Our experts have developed comprehensive guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust.
- My sixth proposition is that we have to be vigilant to what is happening around us and recognise evil when we see it. We must watch the trends and the opinion polls, honestly and with a practical determination to take action against antisemitism, Holocaust denial or other worrisome trends sooner rather than later.
- All societies have to recognise the imperative need to combat hate speech and hate crimes in all their forms at the earliest possible stage before racial, religious and ethnic abuse becomes so frequent, loud and mainstream that it coarsens political discourse and threatens the safety and well-being of a country's inhabitants, whether citizens or not. This imperative need becomes an urgent obligation when hate speech and hate crimes threaten to turn into incitement to violence.
- It follows that societies must understand, protect and promote the central importance of the rule of law and the duty of judges to uphold the law against populist pressures. Citizens and non-citizens alike must be able to trust the legal system, and those empowered to enforce the laws, to stand up for the democratic and constitutional rights of all citizens and all those within the protection of the state.
- And finally a heavy responsibility rests on the press and media to report impartially, fearlessly and frankly, neither fanning the flames of prejudice nor buckling under to threats from political or societal forces intent on whipping up prejudice.
- These days human rights concerns are integral to the foreign policy objectives of many governments. Indeed I would argue that it was universal revulsion at what happened during the Holocaust that was

the prime motivation for many of the institutions and laws that promote equality and non-discrimination across an astonishingly wide field and among countries with very different standards of public tolerance.

- **For**
- **o Whether we look at charges of genocide and torture in the existing six international criminal tribunals (the International Criminal Court and the Tribunals on Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Cambodia and Lebanon);**
- **o Whether we defend the right to freedom of religion or belief in constitutional practices around the world;**
- **o Whether we campaign for women's and children's rights, protect GLBT rights or fight racism, xenophobia, antisemitism or other forms of intolerance and prejudice in our own societies;**

- **we are drawing inspiration from the memory of the Holocaust.**

- **So to recap. My six propositions are:**
 - 1. Promote research and search out the truth**
 - 2. Fight the genocide deniers**
 - 3. Build remembrance as a firebreak against past prejudice**
 - 4. Think hard about why you teach a genocide and constantly assess the impact**
 - 5. Promote ethical values in a society**
 - 6. Be vigilant: stamp hard on the first signs of hate speech, protect the judiciary and the rule of law, and nurture the freedom of a responsible press**

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Strasbourg 22 June 2014