

Speech of

Dr. Mario Silva

**At the Handover Ceremony of the Chairmanship of the International
Holocaust Remembrance Alliance**

**Embassy of Canada in Germany
Berlin, Germany
Tuesday, March 5, 2013**

Thank you Minister Kenney for your kind introduction.

Ambassador Deboutte, Mr. Walsh, and distinguished guests.

Thank you all for joining us today.

Permit me to begin by offering my congratulations and gratitude to Ambassador Jan Deboutte for his exceptional leadership of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance over the past year.

I would like to publicly acknowledge what a special honour it has been and will be to continue to work with you.

Under Ambassador Deboutte's guidance and leadership, we have met a number of challenges, including the clarification of the legal status of the IHRA and implementation process of a new name.

We were also pleased that the ambassador took the time during his busy year to visit three cities in Canada during Holocaust Education Week in November.

It is reassuring to know that we can continue to rely upon your support, along with that of our good friends in the United Kingdom, who will assume the Chair of the IHRA in 2014. In this regard I would like to thank Sir Andrew Burns for his presence here today. It is very much appreciated and I look forward to working closely with you.

While Canada may indeed be a recent member of the IHRA, this fact in no way diminishes our deep and abiding commitment to the IHRA and the honourable principles of the Stockholm Declaration.

Our Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Minister Jason Kenney have taken a very personal interest in the IHRA and its mission.

As Minister Kenney noted in Oslo in 2009 during the meeting at which Canada became a full ITF member, "It is critically important to be

engaged in efforts to teach future generations the lessons of the Holocaust and help prevent future acts of genocide.”

I am honoured to note that within Canada all of our major political parties share this commitment. Indeed, our nation's Parliament unanimously endorsed the construction of a National Holocaust Monument in Ottawa. This effort has now commenced and we look forward to sharing with all of you our progress in the coming year.

As IHRA Chair, I will work with delegates of IHRA member states, observer countries, and permanent observers.

Permit me to take a moment to share with you several of Canada's goals for our Chairmanship:

- We will build upon the multi-year work plans formulated by experts and advanced under Ambassador Deboutte's leadership.
- We will pursue partnerships with other international bodies to better align our efforts and are grateful for the participation of IHRA permanent observers: the UN, OSCE, UNESCO, the Claims Conference, Council of Europe and European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.
- I will visit observer IHRA's observer countries – Portugal, Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Turkey – to encourage their ascension to full membership.
- We will continue outreach to non-IHRA states. For example, prior to arriving in Berlin, I visited Ukraine with Minister Kenney. It's a key region of Holocaust history and, while not yet a member state, it has expressed interest in IHRA's work. Over the coming year, I will work to strengthen that relationship with the support of Canada's large and engaged Ukrainian diaspora.

- Allow me take this opportunity to personally thank the Minister Kenney for his advocacy and support of IHRA during his meetings in Ukraine. Canada chairmanship of the IHRA is in large part due to his leadership.
- We will develop a means of greater transparency and communication of IHRA's priorities and progress. We believe there is potential for a standardized Annual Chair report to highlight initiatives in member states, IHRA-funded projects, and the efforts of expert working groups.
- Through IHRA's Standing Committee on Anti-Semitism and Holocaust Denial, we will encourage support for the Ottawa Protocol, developed in 2010 when Canada hosted the Inter-Parliamentary Coalition for Combating Anti-Semitism.

Over the coming year, a number of national initiatives will mark the Canadian Chair year aimed at increasing understanding of the Holocaust across Canada:

- The Government of Canada will provide funding to help preserve survivor testimony. Our country has been profoundly shaped by the 40,000 Holocaust survivors who resettled in Canada after the war. Survivors have been a vital component of Holocaust education in Canada, and preserving their testimony is crucial as we move to a post-survivor environment.
- In acknowledgment of the vital contribution teachers make, we will present a National Award to an educator who demonstrates best practices in Holocaust education.
- We will continue our government's efforts to commemorate Jewish Canadian experiences under Canada's restrictive immigration policies. Throughout 2013, travelling exhibits will bring attention to the internment of Jewish refugees in Canada during World War Two and to the tragic story of the MS St. Louis.

- An international academic conference at the University of Toronto in October will target young scholars and emerging scholarship.
- And our national institution, Library and Archives Canada, will develop a research guide on their Holocaust-era records and how they may be accessed.

All of this work is being guided by a National Advisory Council that I co-chair with Senator Linda Frum. The Council includes experts from across Canada, including academics, museum directors, CEOs and leaders from within the Jewish community.

I would like to acknowledge the presence of three members of that Council who are here today:

- Mr. Joseph Gottdenker is a Holocaust survivor and major philanthropist. Through his generous support, the new International Seminars Wing of the International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem opened a year ago. We are delighted that he is with us.
- Mr. Ludwik Klimkowski, Vice-President of the Canadian Polish Congress, is also here.
- And finally, Dr. Frank Chalk from Concordia University is here. Dr. Chalk is the Director of the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies.

Looking ahead, I plan to visit member states to speak with delegations and to listen to their views on how best to move the IHRA and the Stockholm Declaration forward.

I will also participate in events surrounding significant anniversaries, such as the 70th Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in Poland.

This is a particularly important event to commemorate. This courage and bravery of those who rose up was unfortunately met with silence and seeming neutrality from much of the world at the time. I am reminded of the words of Elie Wiesel who said:

"We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."

Part of our work is to ensure that the world never responds in silence or neutrality again to the acts of oppressors and our task in this regard begins by ensuring that generations alive today and to come will indeed always remember.

In May, I will attend the Global Forum for Combating Anti-Semitism in Jerusalem, an organization which many of you know works to fight the growing expressions of antisemitism and other forms of racism around the world.

In all of this, I am happy to have the support of Dr. Kathrin Meyer, the Executive Secretary of the Permanent Office, and of the team of professionals she leads.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, I look forward to welcoming you all to Canada and Toronto next October.

I would now like to introduce you to Dr. Clarence Epstein, Director of Special Projects and Cultural Affairs at Concordia University in Montreal.

Dr. Epstein leads one of the most recognized art restitution efforts in the world, on behalf of the beneficiaries of Max Stern. Max Stern was a German-Jewish art dealer who came to Canada during the Second World War and, following nearly two years of internment as an 'enemy alien', became a renowned figure in the Canadian art world.

Dr. Epstein, acting on behalf of the executors and beneficiaries of the estate of Max Stern, seeks restitution of the art holdings that were either confiscated from Mr. Stern by the Nazis or sold by force in the 1930s.

As you know, efforts at returning Jewish property began soon after the war and continue to this day. But many works of art still need to be restored to their rightful owners or their successors.

Today, we are privileged to hear from Dr. Epstein, and to be witness to a historic moment of the Max Stern Project.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dr. Clarence Epstein.