

**Statement by Ambassador Tom Vraalsen, Norway in Vienna on 17  
March 2009**

Ambassador Ferdinand Trauttmansdorff,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me at the outset to pay tribute to you Ambassador Trauttmansdorff and to your country for the excellent way in which you have discharged your duties as ITF President. The dedication and cooperation of all those involved have been more than impressive. These collective efforts made the Austrian ITF Presidency a success.

Holocaust – as a concept and as a system – originated in the minds of men. It was not a natural disaster. It was a man-made disaster.

The ideas that led to the Holocaust have not disappeared. They find expression in new ways and in new places. They must be fought through awareness-raising, knowledge and firm resistance. This was strongly emphasised by Norway's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jonas Gahr Støre on the occasion of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day earlier this year. The Norwegian Government has on the highest level reaffirmed its commitment to carry on this fight within the ITF and elsewhere.

Prejudice is growing in our own countries and elsewhere, in the public arena and behind the scenes. It is here the fight must be fought. It must be fought in public and in the grey and dark zones of Holocaust denial, anti-Semitism, revisionism, racism and discrimination against minorities. It must be fought against ideologies that exclude groups of people and spread hatred.

We believe that Holocaust education, research and remembrance should not only shed light on the past. It should also shed light on our own time. The ITF plays an indispensable role in this regard. The ITF can help us address the dynamics that we know precede mass killings, genocides and other forms of breakdown of civilised norms of behaviour.

In the ITF we have an important tool for helping ourselves and for helping others. We do so by reaching out to people's minds, both individually and collectively. We will do so through cooperation with schools, museums, memorials and research institutions.

ITF has contributed to an improved level of understanding of the Holocaust in many countries. The growth in membership is resulting from an increasing awareness of this in the international community. When Norway became a member of ITF in 2003, there were 16 member countries. Today, the ITF has 26 member countries, in addition to liaison and observer countries. More countries have indicated interest in joining.

ITF's growth brings with it new opportunities and important challenges.

During the Austrian Presidency important steps have been taken to strengthen the Task Force and make us better prepared for the future. The Austrian presidency has made ITF more visible to the public. During the Austrian Presidency the Permanent Office of ITF in Berlin became fully operational. This has reinforced the institutional capacity of ITF. It has made it function more effectively. I pay tribute to the Executive Secretary, Kathrin Meyer, for her untiring efforts.

Furthermore the Austrian Presidency has strengthened the cooperation with other multilateral organizations dealing with Holocaust awareness, such as UN, OSCE and Council of Europe.

Norway will build on the achievements made under the Austrian Presidency. The ITF constitutes a unique and outstanding network of expertise in the field of Holocaust research, remembrance and education. We must make maximum use of this reservoir of expertise and professional knowledge. The Norwegian Presidency wishes to strengthen the political impact of ITF in the field of Holocaust awareness.

The mass murder of Jews and other groups of people who did not fit into the Nazi conception of a racial state, will always be an indelible stain in the history of Europe. The Holocaust was the most horrific genocide the world has ever seen.

The story of the Holocaust – or Shoah in Hebrew – tells us of the horrendous consequences of anti-Semitism in our recent past.

We share a commitment to throw light on the past. ITF should continue its work to encourage the opening of all relevant archives. All documents bearing on the Holocaust should be available to researchers.

ITF's work is essential to ensure that future generations understand the Holocaust. We all have a duty to prevent anti-Semitism from ever again gaining a foothold in our own country or in any other country.

We look forward to work with all member countries of the ITF to achieve our goals.

Thank you.