24 November 2017

Welcome Address: Mass Murder of People with Disabilities and the Holocaust

Brigitte Bailer, member of the AWG

Ambassador Bättig, director Schweizer, speakers and participants, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor and pleasure to welcome you to this conference here in Bern today.

We very much appreciate that so many of you are prepared to spend your Sunday listening to presentations on heinous crimes perpetrated by National Socialists across occupied Europe.

The mass murder of people with disabilities was carried out both in the shadow of the war as well as alongside the crimes of the Holocaust.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, or IHRA for short, unites governments and experts to strengthen, advance and promote Holocaust education, remembrance and research worldwide.

The Holocaust, this unprecedented crime - to quote the IHRA Honorary Chairman Yehuda Bauer, whose presentation we are going to hear later today - this unprecedented crime against the Jews of Europe was perpetrated in an ideological and historical context that included crimes against

and mass murder of other groups of people the National Socialists deemed unfit to live.

It is for this reason that the IHRA chose to include in its work the genocide of the Roma. With this conference IHRA takes on another topic of great importance for the understanding of the history of the Holocaust - the mass murder of people with disabilities and the continuities and parallels to the mass murder of Jews.

This conference brings together researchers, representatives of memorial sites and colleagues working in the pedagogical field. And in line with the unique structure of the IHRA, we also have governmental representatives among us. I think this may be the first time that those different groups of participants deal with the history of these National Socialist crimes together enabling an exchange of ideas and impressions from a variety of perspectives.

And this could only be done by the IHRA as it is unique in bringing together experts from the field of Holocaust remembrance, education, and research with governmental representatives

The conference proceedings will be published within the publication series of the IHRA as well, providing another tool in IHRA's work to make knowledge and expertise about the Holocaust and related crimes visible and accessible to policymakers, researchers and educators today. It is my hope that today's conference give impetus to further cooperation and synergies in the fields of the mass murder of people with disabilities and the Holocaust.

The idea for this conference emerged from the Academic Working Group of the IHRA and the planning was carried out together with representatives of the Museums and Memorials Working Group and Education Working Group. I want to thank my colleagues Thomas Lutz, Otto Rühl, David Silberklang and Juliane Wetzel for their advice and support during the preparation for this conference. I thank also the IHRA Permanent Office, especially Rosvita Krajinovic, Laura Robertson and Julana Bredtmann.

We are very glad that this conference today is the outcome of an excellent cooperation between the IHRA, its Swiss Chairmanship with the Pädagogische Hochschule Bern. Through this cooperation, the outcome of this conference will find its way to Swiss teachers and educators as well. I warmly thank the Pädagogische Hochschule and its staff, and particularly Mr. Gschwend for all the organizational support you have given. Without you we could not have held this conference today.

My special thanks go to the Swiss Chairmanship - the Swiss colleagues supported the idea of this conference from the very beginning, namely Francois Wisard and Ambassador Bättig, and I have to thank Nathalie Bardill for her thoughtful and careful support.

Finally let me thank today's speakers and moderators. With your contributions you honour those people with disabilities whose were murdered under the National Socialist regime. I wish you and us fruitful discussions.