

Dan Tichon – Opening Speech of Israeli Chairmanship – ITF Handover 2010

Opening

Ambassador Tom Vraalsen, Ambassador Sven Erik Svedman and other members of the Diplomatic corps, distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Personal

During my lifetime, I have been privileged to have served in many public roles some of which were in key positions in Israeli life, and I am proud of my role as one of the architects of the new, special relationship between Israel and Germany. But I can honestly say that the role I am accepting here today is one of the most important. The mission of the ITF is to teach about history so that we do not repeat its mistakes. As such, the ITF is not about the past, it is about our very future. The ITF teaches universal values that apply the world over, and I am humbled to be part of this process.

As a legislator and former Speaker of the Israeli Knesset, my appointment as ITF chair marks a change, as past chairs came from the ranks of the diplomatic corps, and many were indeed ambassadors themselves. I hope this shift in direction will help us diversify and, bring in both local leaders, such as mayors and police chiefs, religious leaders and other power brokers, as well as members of the International Parliamentary Union, and other organizations I am privy to.

During the 20 some years that I served in Knesset, I took it upon myself to mentor new Knesset members in their passage through parliament. One of the lessons I tried to instill in the new parliamentarians were the limits of power and the corruption inherent in power, for it is easy for young Members to think that everything is permissible to them, and to be intoxicated by their newfound authority.

Germany/Holocaust

A second lesson I felt that needed to be imparted on the new Members was the necessity for a separation of powers and a balanced government, and no where is this more evident than what happened in Germany before the Second World War. Indeed, I believe that the events of World War II could have been avoided if Germany had a balanced system of government.

In 1963 I toured Germany in an attempt to understand – beyond what is written in the history books – just how something like the *Sboah* could take place. As President Obama recently said:

"It is our duty to remember the way of thinking that was distorted in Germany. How a flourishing culture that produced among others Mozart, Beethoven, Heine, Einstein, Goethe and friends, became corrupted and justified the worst acts of barbarism in recorded human history."

In 1981, I was elected to Knesset, and on my first trip as a member of the Israel-Germany Inter-parliamentary Group, I participated in the symposium in Bonn that dealt with *Krystallnacht*. In one of the breaks we visited the house of Konrad Adenauer, and following this visit to Chancellor Adenauer's home the question in my mind was raised

whether the Holocaust – genocide – can happen again and, if so, under what circumstances? Indeed, the Holocaust raises tough questions. How far can the wicked reach? To what extent can a cultured, refined, and educated nation be brainwashed by evil? We need to understand this phenomenon and do our utmost to educate people so that we can prevent this from happening again. Let me quote the words of the President of Israel, Mr. Shimon Peres, who said recently in his speech in the Bundestag:

"Never again can we allow such racist doctrine... No more ignoring bloodthirsty dictators that hide behind demagogic masks while spewing genocidal slogans."

ITF

The founder of the ITF, former Swedish Prime Minister, Göran Persson, was motivated, by a number of factors, including his personal visit to the Neuengamme concentration camp, his reading about Jewish children who were murdered there, and finally, by the results of a poll conducted among high-school children in Sweden, which showed doubts about whether the genocide of Jews in World War Two actually happened.

We are here today to mark the official handover of the chairmanship of the ITF to Israel. For me, the fact that this ceremony takes place in Berlin is particularly symbolic.

The purpose of the ITF is to foster Holocaust education, remembrance, and research both nationally and internationally, and so far we have 27 full member states and a number of states that are awaiting membership. Through the various bodies of the ITF, we carry out the goals that we have set for ourselves.

There are many people we would like to thank for their contribution over the past year to the ITF. Ambassador Tom Vraalsen, the ITF Chair for 2009, whose distinguished political and diplomatic career speaks for itself, has injected new life and direction into the ITF. Tom, together with his Senior Advisors, Monika Furnes and Ingrid Selnes, have infused new and timely content and successfully defined the needs and the role of the organization as it navigates its way through the second decade of the 21st century.

After 10 years the work carried out by the ITF could not have been accomplished were it not for our two academic advisors, Professor Yehuda Bauer and Professor Dina Porat. On this occasion I would like to thank these two for their enormous and key contributions to promoting the ideas of the ITF.

Particularly worthy of praise is Kathrin Meyer, the Executive Secretary of the ITF, who has managed an efficient team that is successfully dealing with the new challenges posed to the organization and the secretariat. This team deserves our support, especially since it carries the load during the year.

Finally I would like to present Ambassador Jacob Rosen, who until recently was Israel's ambassador to Jordan, as the coordinator of the Israeli Chairmanship team for 2010.

Recommendations

As Israel takes over the chairmanship for the year 2010, which marks the 10 year anniversary of the ITF, I would like to share some of the goals and ideas for this year which have been drafted by a joint team, which included among others, representatives of Yad Vashem, headed by Avner Shalev, and by representatives of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, headed by Aviva Raz Schechter. I am also very eager to look to the

future, and to the cooperation and integration of the Dutch team that will succeed the Israeli team in 2011.

2009 was the worst year for antisemitism since the end of World War II. The activities and message of extremists who are using new and innovative technologies has reached alarming levels. We need to act to prevent this. While The Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research (ITF) is portrayed as a high quality organization, there are several ways we can extend and improve on our reach and impact.

- We need to look into the establishment of a strong spokesperson department, which would be able to transform the ITF from a reputable organization within the member states to an influential and internationally recognized body that deals with global current events in growing numbers.
- We need to define the ITF's legal status in Germany, Europe and beyond
- We need to look into promoting the ITF in more efficient and attractive ways.
- We have to consider a policy to incorporate new members.
- We must concentrate on targeting specific sectors of society, such as politicians, police, army, mayors, journalists, religious leaders and decision makers.
- We have to analyze the efficiency and effectiveness over the past 10 years of the ITF in general, and of the individual committees and working groups in particular, and make any necessary changes.

In January of this year, the Israeli Chairmanship team met with Yad Vashem to help formulate an Activity Plan for the year, where the following goals were outlined:

- Upgrading Holocaust awareness worldwide, retaining the focus on appropriate commemoration, and as per the Trondheim Plenary Summary, *"to make better use of Holocaust Memorial Days to increase the Holocaust awareness in member countries and beyond."*
- Identify and actively target multipliers and decision-makers in the ITF Member states, reaffirming commitment to the Stockholm Declaration of 2000 via a number of new initiatives.
- Implementing distance learning programs for relevant target groups within ITF Member states and beyond.
- Creation of long-term goals to be agreed upon and jointly defined by the Troika (Current, successor and future appointed chairs of the ITF – Norway, Israel and the Netherlands)
- In due course, we will present a detailed program on how to implement these goals

Conclusion

The question is in what direction is the ITF heading? The ITF has a key responsibility in spreading Holocaust education worldwide. As stated on the ITF's website, there are obstacles that must be overcome, such as apathy with regards to the topic, political roadblocks, and others. However, if we allow people to forget the lessons of the Holocaust, history may well repeat itself.

The ITF is dedicated to prevent this outcome.