

Statement by Ambassador Karel de Beer, Netherlands, in Berlin on 7 March 2011

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, the Netherlands has the privilege and honor to take up the Chair of the International Task Force on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF). On behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport, I would like to express our gratitude for having the opportunity to hold the presidency of this important organization. The Netherlands holds the view that international cooperation and collaboration on Holocaust education, remembrance and research is more important than ever. The Netherlands takes this Chairmanship very seriously and we will do whatever is necessary to make headway for the ITF.

First and foremost I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the whole team of the Israeli chairmanship and the Chair Dan Tichon in particular. Their dedication to strengthen our commitment to the Stockholm Declaration should be commended. We should be grateful to the Israeli Chair for their efforts to increase the visibility of the ITF outside Europe and the Americas. I believe that the Israeli Chairmanship Project has been extremely successful and will set the standard for Holocaust outreach and education in the years to come.

The Dutch historian Pieter Geyl is remembered for his words “history is an argument without end.” As time passes, we will be dealing with new generations. Each generation has its own view on history and historical events. We cannot expect that future generations will have a similar view on the Holocaust as we have. In that sense I agree with Pieter Geyl that history is an argument without end. No doubt that the ITF has to take this into consideration. However, except for some specialized historians, we do not argue about most historical events, about devastating wars, and even about many genocides/mass murders in history. We are not emotionally involved in the atrocities of Napoleons campaign in Russia two centuries ago, and the Dutch are not attached to their revolt against Spanish rule in the 16th and 17th century anymore. These arguments have ended.

World War II and the Holocaust are different. Not because they are more recent than Napoleon’s campaign or the Dutch revolt. They are different because they are still incomprehensible, they show the darkest side of humankind. And this underscores the relevance of the ITF.

ITF member states are united by the commitments of the Stockholm Declaration, adopted 11 years ago. This Declaration has not lost its relevance and imperativeness; in fact its mandate for the ITF has grown in importance as the Holocaust itself and its meaning for humanity has only become more relevant with the passage of time. The purpose of ITF is to place political and social leaders support behind the memory and meaning of the Holocaust

for the benefit of the current and future generations. It is our mission to keep the memory alive and meaningful.

Yehuda Bauer, ITF's honorary chairman, but also ITF's architect and ambassador, once said: "Thou shall not be a victim, thou shall not be a perpetrator, but, above all, thou shall not be a bystander." I believe this is a very important notion where the ITF should focus on. It coincides with what the former German president, Richard von Weizsaecker, said: "There were many ways of not burdening one's conscience, of shunning responsibility, looking away, keeping mum. When the unspeakable truth of the Holocaust then became known at the end of the war, all too many of us claimed that they had not known anything about it or even suspected anything."

Education, remembrance and research – the three “instruments of the ITF” should empower future generations to be vigilant, to be well-informed, to stand up and to speak out. This is ITF's challenge.

I am looking forward working with all the delegates of ITF member states, liaison countries, observer countries and permanent observers. Their opinions, comments and ideas will be highly appreciated. I have visited to date 21 member states, and the remaining 7 will be visited in the next few months. I have talked not only to Heads of Delegations, but also to Working Group delegates, politicians, experts, and Jewish communities. The goal was to get acquainted with the ITF and to acquire views and ideas about the future of the ITF. I have developed a work

program for the coming year in which I have sought to incorporate these views.

Last but not least, I am glad that that the ITF has a great Permanent Office, headed by Dr. Kathrin Meyer. I am looking forward to working with them and I do hope that it will be an interesting, fruitful and pleasant year.

Former speaker of the Knesset, soon-to-be former Chairman of the ITF, Dear Dan Tichon, I would like to thank you for chairing the ITF. Over the last 10 months we have had many discussions about the ITF and I learned a lot from your experience as its chair. So I would like to express my gratitude to you.