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ITF HANDOVER: Chair's Speech

Berlin 8.3.2011

Ambassadors, HoD's, Ladies and Gentleman, Dear Friends,

A year has passed since the last handover here in Berlin and it's about high time to summarize our activities during this time. Last year when Israel took over I said, and here I quote, "During my lifetime I have been privileged to serve in many public roles some of which were in key positions in Israeli life but I can honestly say that the role I am accepting here in Berlin is the most important." Following that, I counted our goals and outlined an action plan which would try to cope with the new challenges.

13 years have passed since the establishment of the ITF which is based on the Stockholm Declaration. When the ITF was established (the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) the world seemed organized and stable, marching towards the promising tomorrow. The reality today (2011) is completely different. The world suffers from a lack of stability, new emphases are continuously introduced and they change quite frequently, new systems enter the stage such as the Internet and social networks and they "threaten" to rapidly change our reality. In this new reality nothing is immune and everything is constantly being reexamined. The target audience is different today and the ITF has to address the young generation which has adopted sophisticated technological tools.

Some of us believe that the Holocaust and anti-Semitism are unjustly marginalized and other subjects and issues such as democracy, racism and human rights take their place. In our domain we realize that the last of the survivors are passing away while all sorts of Holocaust deniers are receiving too much attention. The central issue in my concluding speech deals with the question: Will the ITF adjust itself to the new reality which is shaping itself right in front of our eyes?

The founding generation of the ITF, some of whom witnessed the Holocaust, is moving away and being replaced by a younger generation of representatives of States, organizations and the academic community. This process is at its peak and will impact the ITF in the coming years. I said in the past and I think it's correct to repeat it: I regard the ITF as a small important and prestigious organization which tries to navigate itself in a world which is continuously changing its emphases and outlook. The changes of emphases are a very difficult process because the ITF is a consensus (unanimously) based organization. In other words, the decisions are based on a compromise basis and the willingness of the member states to move forward together. During the whole year we discussed questions which deal with the ITF's challenges. We tried to predict what was going to happen but unfortunately we still did not manage to finalize a clear course (an agreed program).

Since we are in the process of summarizing, I believe that the ITF plenary should allocate time for a serious discussion about the Task Force's future path. This year we started dealing with it but because of time constraints we did not yet reach conceptual ripeness and this is a pity. As I said in the past, the ITF has to strengthen its contact with international organizations which are headed by politicians and organizations which are considered to be public opinion shapers. An important issue which we began dealing with was converting

the organization from an important, prestigious and unknown one to a known and recognized organization with well synchronized PR. Without a proper PR organ the ITF will have difficulties achieving its goals.

Sometimes I felt that in recent years unnecessary differences of opinion emerged about the functions of 3 components of the Task Force: the Secretariat, the Plenary and the Working Groups. Those differences subsided towards the second half of the year but they still constitute a danger. My term like my predecessor's, who did an excellent job, was short (practically 9 months) and it didn't leave me any choice but to enter my predecessor's shoes and take the same path and routine! Short chairmanship turns procedures into the main issue and it is a pity. In the beginning of 2010 we devoted too much time to procedures and sometimes neglected the main issues. We lost a lot of precious time. It created a situation where the marginal issues became the main ones and the main issues became marginal ones and personal conflicts threatened to paralyze the ITF.

In the second half we managed to change the emphasis and we reaped the fruits when we adopted a long list of important decisions, (not procedural), which will lead the ITF forward. In practice we leaped towards the future. I mentioned that in the last Plenary we discussed various important issues which constitute the leap forward which will impact the ITF's actions in the future. Unfortunately, because of time constraints, I must mention only some of those issues (details will be provided in the full report).

#### Liaison and Observer Countries:

Finland was admitted as the 28<sup>th</sup> member of the ITF. On the doorstep (Liaison) are the following countries: Ireland, Serbia and Slovenia- We hope that they will take the next steps to enable them to become full members soon.

Observer countries- Portugal, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), and Turkey are observer countries. It is important to work with them so they may also be admitted in the near future.

Expanding the ITF: Today the ITF has 28 member States. These States include almost all the members of the EU, the USA, Canada, Argentina and Israel (Finland is the most recent State to be admitted after a lengthy process). Now, the main issue is formulating the ITF's policy on admitting new member States. I raised this issue in the all 4 meetings which were held in 2010. It is recommended that the Plenary dedicate a special session on formulating a policy on admitting new member States. As an opening remark I would like to draw your attention that the world is changing and the center of gravity is shifting and widening. In addition to the Western States, most of whom are members of the ITF, new States which have no association with the ITF and in which most of the world population is concentrated, are gaining special status and weight.

It is inconceivable that an organization that has declared its goals to be Holocaust education and memory will ignore the existence of countries like Japan, Australia, New Zealand, India, Brazil, Kazakhstan (and more).  
AND IT'S BETTER TO ACT EARLIER RATHER THAN LATER.

#### Decisions concerning Holocaust denial:

During the December Plenary we adopted a very important decision which advances the combat against Holocaust deniers. The member countries which were initially hesitant and debated alternatives displayed a high level of responsibility when they brought the issue to the finishing line (we adopted a frame/baseline but still have to add a definition).

#### Plenary decisions based on WG's recommendations:

In the past I have heard harsh criticism about the cooperation between the Working Groups and the Plenary. It seemed that both bodies acted separately. Following this criticism, heads of working groups submitted for

the first time (towards the second Plenary in Haifa) a long list of recommendations, a majority of which were adopted after the thorough discussion. I have no doubt that the implementation of these decisions will contribute a lot to the widening of the ITF's scope of activity in the near future. (Reference annex ....)

The ITF decision based on a proposal by Austria, Argentina and Norway that requires member States to submit an annual report about their activities: Through the years criticism was raised about States which were admitted to the ITF but afterwards did not invest in the effort to justify their membership. This is why it is imperative that this proposal was submitted. This is a very important decision and its implementation will deepen the activities and the commitment of the ITF members.

#### Chair's Project:

Two new initiatives comprised our "Chair's Project". I am delighted that the Israeli Chairmanship was the first to initiate such a program. We launched a sophisticated distance-learning online portal, which is now part of the ITF site. Further, the "International Training Team" sent three delegations composed of three experts in Holocaust Education to Portugal, Slovenia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia- all liaison and observer countries- for intensive training, lectures, seminars and meetings around January 27<sup>th</sup>, International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Based on the reports I have seen, I am sure that we all agree that without a doubt, the Chair's project has broken important ground in all of these States. This is a very important initiative and I am sure others will follow in our footsteps.

Legal Status of the ITF: Over the years the ITF acted without legal guiding lines. In April 2010 we decided to establish a Legal Drafting Group which will prepare the rules that will shape the ITF's legal personality. On December 3<sup>rd</sup> the Draft Working and Financial rules was circulated to all HoD's of the member countries. They were asked to comment in writing by 28 February, 2011. I presume that the work on this very important issue will be finalized in 2011. I want to thank the Austrian delegation which spearheads this effort.

#### Summary:

The Israel Chairmanship is reaching its end and as far as I am concerned it is the end of a difficult period paved with many challenges. To sum up in one sentence: we faced many difficulties in the beginning of our journey but in the end it was productive and successful.

And this is the moment to offer thanks to all those who helped to push the carriage up the hill.

We are unhappily bidding farewell to our Academic Advisor Dina Porat. Professor Dina Porat is rightfully praised all over the world and is considered one of the most important Holocaust researchers. I personally had the honor of witnessing Dina's major contribution to the work of the ITF during her period as Academic Advisor. In the name of all of us all I can say that her absence will not go unnoticed.

I would like to thank Professor Yehuda Bauer who has been with the ITF since its inception for his longstanding contribution to the formation of the Task Force.

I would like to thank the HoD's and the Heads of the professional WG's who contributed a lot to the ITF'S success in 2010.

In particular I would like to thank the Secretariat in Berlin, under the efficient and meticulous supervision of Ms. Kathrin Meyer.

And of course the imperative back-stage work handled most professionally by Mr. Lev Libeskind.

It goes without saying that I am grateful for the Israeli delegation, the co-chairs, Mrs. Aviva Raz-Schechter, and my good friend Avner Shalev, "Mr. Yad Vashem" and his team, who contributed a lot to my success as a Chair.

And a final word of gratitude goes to the Diplomatic Coordinator of the Israel Chairmanship, Ambassador Jacob Rosen, who was always around in a good mood and with handy advice.

Lastly, I would like to wish success to the incoming Chair, Karel De Beer and his team!