

## **Speech Ambassador Karel de Beer, ITF Chair**

### **Conference of Ukrainian Graduates of the International School for Holocaust Studies**

#### **Commemorating 70 years of Babi Yar Mass Murder**

**Kiev, October 4.**

Excellencies, distinguished graduates, ladies and gentlemen,

- It is a privilege to be here today at the conference for Ukrainian Yad Vashem graduates. I would like to express my gratitude to the organizers for giving me the opportunity to say a few words. I am also grateful for attending yesterday's commemoration events. I was deeply moved by the respectful, impressive way that the Babi Yar mass murder is commemorated in Kiev. It was also a reassurance of the importance and the relevance of commemorating the Holocaust and educating our youngsters about it. Yesterday truly illustrated the inconceivable suffering of the Ukrainian people in the 20<sup>th</sup>

century and reminded me of the immense struggles they faced.

- This year I have the honor to be the Chairman of the ITF. The ITF – the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research - is an international organization dedicated primarily to Holocaust remembrance. Its 28 Member Countries meet twice a year to discuss contemporary issues related to Holocaust education, remembrance and research. Together we take initiatives for projects, we share best practices and we encourage cooperation between governments and between NGO's.
- What stroke me most as a Chairman is that in all 28 ITF Member Countries the Holocaust is linked to the country's own history. Perhaps you could even say in some countries: to its own trauma, regardless whether or not their history is related directly to the Holocaust. For example, in Argentina I was asked about the military dictatorship in the 1970s, the Baltic states struggle with

the Holocaust in relation to the Soviet occupation, and in the Balkan countries the perception on the Holocaust is also influenced by the wars in the 1990s. The most powerful illustration of this phenomenon is the fact that the Centro Ana Frank in Buenos Aires – a copy of the Anne Frank house in Amsterdam - is located in a house where people were hidden during the Videla regime of the 1970s. I dare to assume that this “linkage to the country’s own history” is true for Ukraine as well. What is the contemporary context in which Babi Yar is commemorated? To put it simply: the Holocaust is living history!

- The Holocaust is living history and it should stay this way in the future – and I believe the ITF can contribute to that. A Dutch historian once said “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. Also our contemporary view on the Holocaust

differs from the view in – for example- the 1950s. You could call this “the dynamics of remembrance”.

- Please allow me to illustrate this with an example from my home country: the Netherlands. “The dynamics of remembrance” is an in English translated title of a Dutch book on how World War II has been remembered in the Netherlands since 1945 also in comparison to other countries. Since 1945, the Second World War has been commemorated, portrayed and experienced very differently by different population groups. This also goes for other countries.
- In the decades immediately after 1945 in the Netherlands and other Western European countries the remembrance of WWII was of a predominantly nationalistic nature. It was about the perceived courageous resistance against the German occupation of the Netherlands. The focus was not on the victims, especially not on the victims of the Holocaust, the Jews, the Roma and Sinti and others.

- Slowly but surely a change of focus occurred in the 1960s. The victims became the epicentre of remembrance and in particular the victims of the Holocaust. To many, Auschwitz has become *the* reference point of WWII. To illustrate this: a recent Dutch survey showed that 70% of the respondents thought that WWII was a result of the Holocaust. Indeed, we in the Netherlands have some challenges too when it comes to education....
- This example from the Netherlands shows that the Holocaust is living history. The ITF provides an excellent platform to discuss views, experiences and expectations of this living history. The ITF provides a perfect environment to learn about the latest developments in Holocaust research, education and remembrance.
- From a Western European perspective the extermination camps – in particular Auschwitz – represent the Holocaust. The fact that a huge number of Jews were killed in particularly Eastern Europe on killing sites such as Babi Yar, is not known to many Western Europeans. The objective is to have a more accurate, balanced depiction of

the Holocaust in education, remembrance and research.

Obviously, in geographical terms this would mean that the focus will be more on Eastern Europe. I sincerely hope that the ITF can play a beneficial role in how Ukraine and its neighboring countries will be dealing with the remembrance of the atrocities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and their meaning for today's society.

- Ladies and gentlemen, dear Yad Vashem graduates, you have a difficult task, but it is a task which importance cannot easily be underestimated. Of course it is essential to teach the facts about the Holocaust. But there is much more to do. It is our obligation to use the memory and meaning of the Holocaust for the benefit of current and future generations. We should empower future generations to be vigilant, to be well-informed, to stand up and to speak out. It is our mission to keep the memory alive and meaningful. After all, in the words of Primo Levi: "It happened, therefore it can happen again".