

Mayor Rita Ottervik's speech at the ITF plenary meeting in Trondheim, Norway, 3 December 2009

Mr. Chairman,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Friends,

It was a great honour and pleasure to receive you and entertain you last evening at the Archbishop's Palace. In my remarks I reflected on the past. I told you about the fates of two of Trondheim's citizens, one a Holocaust victim, the other a survivor.

Today, as you are ready to deal with the substantive issues on your agenda, I will talk about the present and the future.

The need to address Holocaust denial, ethnic cleansing, racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia is ever present. Since 1998 the ITF has grown. The work the ITF does is extremely important. The victims of Holocaust have left us with a legacy of universal significance, a legacy that calls on us to teach future generations to remember and learn from the past.

You must ask yourselves all the time: Should business be conducted differently? Is ITF's structure optimal? Does the ITF have the means needed if you are to play a more active political role?

It is not for me to try to answer these questions. However, I know that these challenges are on the mind of a number of you. I only wish to encourage you to take on these challenges and charter the way forward.

At the first Plenary meeting in Oslo in June, our Foreign Minister stated in his opening speech :

“Genocide starts with people. It is people who create an environment of fear. It is people who commit atrocities – wherever they occur. History has demonstrated time and again that cruelty cannot be linked to nationality, ethnicity or religion. It can surface anywhere, at any time. However, so can the will to fight it. The human mind can be a most inhumane weapon – but it can also be our most formidable weapon”.

Your task, your responsibility is through your collective efforts to energize the human mind, to make it into an effective weapon in the fight against genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia. The Stockholm Declaration states that we must uphold the terrible truth of the Holocaust against those who deny it. In this struggle we must strengthen the moral commitment of our peoples and the political commitment of our governments. We must ensure that future generations can understand the causes of the Holocaust and reflect upon its consequences.

The ITF is unique as it is the only organization fully dedicated to fight Holocaust denial. Your Working Groups represent an unmatched reservoir of academic knowledge and practical experience. As centres of excellence the Working Groups are well positioned to offer advice

to the Plenary for political action.

It is through Plenary decisions based on the Working Group recommendations that member governments commit themselves to act against Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism.

At your Plenary Meeting in Oslo in June you adopted a reform package with the objective to professionalize ITF and make it a political player on the global scene. It is an ambitious goal. But you can make it through determination and a clear sense of direction. I understand that you at this meeting will be invited to consider additional measures that will complete the reform package.

We like to think that every human being is of equal value. We celebrate the ideals of human equality in our declarations and speeches. But we must critically consider the way in which we today treat our own minorities. On our own streets they feel stigmatised, insecure and even afraid. This is simply unacceptable.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Finally, with your permission, let me take the liberty to say just a few words about our fair city. Trondheim has throughout its history received immigrants from near and far. This has enriched our city in so many ways.

Our population today comprises 170 000 inhabitants, and 16 000 of these are immigrants from 100 countries. 64 languages are spoken and taught in our elementary schools. Close to 10 per cent of the 30 000 students at our university and colleges come from countries other than Norway. Our immigrant “minorities” provide us with knowledge, inspiration and indeed cultural impulses. This rich diverse mix makes Trondheim an international city. And we also like to think; a city with a big heart.

Let me conclude by wishing you a productive meeting, a meeting that will move the ITF forward as a political actor on the global scene.

Thank you for your attention.