

**Statement by the ITF Chair, Ambassador Tom Vraalsen at
the Stockholm Declaration Symposium 26 January 2010**

The Stockholm Declaration (SD) lives and could live its own life relatively independent from the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF). The Declaration is a historic document with an outreach and importance that goes beyond the members of the ITF. On the other hand, the ITF can only exist being based on SD. The ITF is an attempt to give ideas, the attitudes and the values of the SD institutional weight and force.

Let me at the outset walk you back in time and take a look at the history leading up to the Holocaust. From there “lessons learned” to be applied to today’s developments. The SD – as it has been passed on through the work of the ITF – has increased the awareness of the fundamental collapse of civilisation, a collapse expressed in the extreme by the Holocaust. It was a collapse that had its centre in the heart of Europe. It might seem paradoxical that this erosion of civilized codes of conduct occurred where the constitutional state had been established and where we find the foremost contributions to European culture in music, art, literature and science. Furthermore, the collapse came not from the fringe of society, but from its centre, from its elites and its universities.

This gives substance to the very first sentence in the SD that the Shoah fundamentally challenged the foundation of modern western civilization.

The SD’s focus on the relationship between the Shoah and the basis for western civilization encourages us to reflect on these civilization’s two faces. On one side the humanism, renaissance, human rights, democracy and a constitutional state. On the other

hand colonialism, slave trade, racism, anti-Semitism and wars within Europe and elsewhere. It is within this context of the two faces we should reflect on the conditions for Holocaust and other mass murders, like the genocide of the Roma people. The SD moves this fundamental issue out of the limited confines of academic research and moves into the public domain. This is a major contribution by the SD.

This issue has been high on the agenda of the ITF. The Task Force has succeeded in placing the Holocaust and with the consequential moral, civil and political issues it raises, at the centre of the unceasing debate about the nature of civilization. In its member countries through educational, scholarly and commemorative activities, it has contributed to the urgent debate over the appropriate direction of our national community. This debate is of immense importance in light of current developments in some societies with increasing anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia.

The ITF has recently adopted 3 year strategy consisting of two programmes. One of the programmes addresses the following: Raise awareness and promote research into the causes of the holocaust, its driving forces and mechanisms, with a view to preventing genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, anti-Semitism and Xenophobia (with reference to para 3 of the SD). I have high hopes that this programme will offer practical ways to deal with the negative sides of society.

Now let me take a look at the SD and the ITF. Even though it was born in 1998 it is primarily a product of the political environment and conditions created by the SD. The ITF is the legitimate child of the SD.

Intended as a short lived group of governments supporting educational and other efforts for the purpose of raising awareness of the Holocaust, the ITF grew to a permanent international body in its own right. Today ITF has 27 members from four continents having committed themselves to implement the provisions of the SD. Seven more countries are currently affiliated with the ITF and still others are looking to take part as well.

The ITF's unique impact based on the SD has been to raise the consciousness of many governments to the importance of the

Holocaust. It has enabled its members to be introspective and critically review their national histories. It has fostered the international dialogue about the history and increased mutual understanding between societies.

The ITF is aiming to serve as a voice of moral authority on the international scene when it comes to Holocaust related issues and in confronting Holocaust denial and trivialization. The ITF has not only contributed directly and significantly to transmitting essential historical memories to a new generation, but it has been at the forefront of the ongoing efforts to create an international community of informed and concerned citizens and national leaders.

The ITF has built strong relationships with other international organizations, such as the Council of Europe, European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency, OSCE/ODHIR, UNESCO and the United Nations. Those organization's efforts in the field of Holocaust remembrance are also inspired by the Stockholm Declaration.

In today's globalized world, it is of vital importance that the ITF can make its voice heard. Its focus in a time of growing anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial becomes increasingly political. The ITF must seek ways to channel the creativity of its unique pool of experts into decisions affecting the political level. New initiatives growing out of the SD-mandate are the struggle against anti-Semitism and the situation of the Roma people.

ITF must always be ready to adapt the the current situation and make the necessary adjustments in its modus operandi and its agenda. The world is not static, neither should the ITF be. 10 years is a long time in a fast moving world. So also with the SD. Is the SD up to date facing the current problems? Is it time for the SD to be subjected to an examination? After 10 years I believe these questions should be carefully studied by the SD's founding fathers. The decision is theirs.

Let me recapitulate the two challenges that the Symposium in my view should address:

- 1) How should we address the growing anti-Semitism and the racism and the increasing discrimination against the Roma people?
- 2) Should the Stockholm Declaration be examined? Is it up to date deal with current problems?