



United Kingdom
Chairmanship 2014

Chair's White Paper

IHRA: Increasing Effectiveness and Global Outreach

London, 25 February 2014

Today, the United Kingdom has the honour to take over the Chairmanship of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) from Canada. The UK was one of the founding members of the organization (then known as the International Task Force, ITF) and our commitment to the Stockholm Declaration and its principles is as strong as ever at governmental and political levels as well as within civil society.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank the Canadian Chair Dr. Mario Silva and his entire team for the leadership they have provided throughout this past year and for the substantial achievements which IHRA has been able to accomplish under his Chairmanship. It was under the Chairmanship of the Netherlands exactly three years ago that a white paper was presented to IHRA identifying and addressing some of the challenges we were facing. During the last three years, under the Chairmanships of the Netherlands, Belgium, and Canada, IHRA has made great progress. The most apparent were the adoption of a new visual identity and the choice one year ago of a new name, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in place of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (the ITF). These changes went hand in hand with a brand new website including several improved communication and social media tools. The Canadian Chair continued to enhance our internal and external communications by starting to use Twitter, writing a frequent blog and publishing a monthly newsletter: all developments which we shall continue.

In the past three years the IHRA has confirmed its Working Rules, agreed a working definition of Holocaust denial and distortion and embraced a Multi-Year Work Plan with a focus on killing sites, Holocaust Memorial Days, access to archives and educational research. IHRA has established a regular country reporting mechanism, endorsed the International Memorial Museum Charter and intensified Holocaust cooperation with a number of the international organizations that have the status of Permanent International Partners.

I am grateful to all my predecessors who due to their achievements enable me now to take over an international body that is well organized and structured. However, despite everything that has been achieved during the past years, we must continue to assess our way of working towards our common

goal of seeing the principles of the Stockholm Declaration implemented in as many countries as possible, and to do so in challenging situations around the world.

IHRA's Working Process

What was true three years ago, when the Dutch Chair introduced and implemented the idea of fewer meetings (two SIWG/PPC meetings per year were cut out at that point), is even more the case today. Many governments struggle to provide the travel budget necessary for IHRA meetings and ever fewer countries are in the position even to consider a Chairmanship due to its exorbitant costs. IHRA's very success has increased the size and cost of meetings, which has a deterrent effect on member countries considering whether to offer to hold the Chairmanship. Each national delegate costs the Chair country about 2,000 € per person and the size of our meetings necessitates the use of conference centres rather than regular hotels or government offices.

In early December the Canadian Chair convened a meeting of past and future Chairs, together with representatives of the Working Groups to consider the implications of the plenary costs for IHRA. The outcome of this discussion was communicated to all delegates in an email from the Canadian Chair and me on 4 February 2014. In order to assist future Chairmanships, we ought to reach a consensus in May on ways to streamline our future deliberations and make them more cost effective. I hope that in preparation for this discussion, Heads of Delegation will discuss these ideas within their national delegations and will send me in writing any comments they might have before the plenary in London.

All the Working Group representatives at our meeting were keen to see a greater degree of accountability and dialogue within all national delegations. But it will be one of our greatest challenges to adapt our way of working to the increasingly restricted financial resources among most governments as well as NGOs while continuing to enable our Working Groups and committees to do their important work. I want to stress that this discussion will include all levels of IHRA participants and that it is of utmost importance that this unique international body should preserve full scope for the international networking, both among experts but also between governmental representatives and civil society, which has made such a valuable contribution to the development of Holocaust education, remembrance and research over the last decade and a half.

It is vital too that the IHRA Plenary should shift its focus to more content-related discussions and move away from administrative and procedural issues. Debates on substantive issues during the Working Group and Plenary sessions are key to increasing engagement and relevance. My experience at IHRA's ground-breaking Conference on Killing Sites, held in Krakow in January was enlightening and inspiring. I should like to encourage further meaningful and politically relevant IHRA conferences and more significant discussions on content-focused issues. One possibility may be for the Working Groups and committees to hold IHRA conferences on a rotating basis. These conferences would be open to the public and would provide the opportunity for IHRA's experts to present their work to other delegates and a wider audience.

Following on from this, we believe that there could be improvements in the way that IHRA discusses its financial budgeting, so ably managed by the delegation of Sweden. I hope that at the Budget Committee on 14 May we might be able to agree on some practical recommendations to put to the next Plenary. I shall circulate some thoughts for your consideration.

Outreach

Bearing in mind that all structural changes are designed to strengthen our work and impact in the years to come, I see it as one of our crucial goals to engage with the governments and civil society of even more countries than we do now. IHRA is dealing with a subject of universal meaning and importance. What started out as an initiative of three countries in 1998 has grown into a serious intergovernmental body of 31 full member countries and five observers (Bulgaria, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Portugal, Turkey and Uruguay). Most European countries are now engaged with IHRA in one way or another, though there is much still to be done in promoting education, research and remembrance and contacts with countries still not formal Observers let alone full members.

At the Stockholm Forum in 2000, 48 governments from all over the world were represented and as of today 13 of those governments are not yet affiliated with IHRA. They realized the importance of attending the Stockholm Forum and endorsed the Stockholm Declaration, but we are not yet actively cooperating with them. This is why I believe that we need to consider how to develop contacts with the remaining European countries and also those further away from the European experience. This is partly due to expressions of interest by NGOs and others in such countries, but it is also in IHRA's interest to extend our international reach to reflect the global significance of the Holocaust, the global challenge of Holocaust denial, and the insights IHRA can bring to the work of genocide prevention in other arenas. We need to develop an agreed policy among us so that IHRA values can be carried beyond our current borders.

During the past years contact has been initiated with a number of countries. It was in 2010 when the plenary decided to task the Chair to start engaging with countries in North Africa. Due to the political developments immediately following this decision, those plans were put on hold, but I hope to visit Morocco this year as a first step to follow up on this decision. I will do this in close cooperation with IHRA experts who are already engaged there.

The current Troika of past, present and future Chairs has discussed with the Permanent International Partners outreach to some of the European countries in the Balkans not yet involved. The Working Groups have already been approached for input and we hope to deliver more details and report on first steps at our meetings in May.

Depending on the political situation in Ukraine I am planning to continue the efforts of my predecessor and try to start a formal cooperation between IHRA and Ukraine.

The Steering Committee on Holocaust Memorial Days visited Moldova on 27 January. This visit was coordinated and organized together with our Permanent International Partner OSCE/ODIHR.

Upon invitation of the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs a roundtable took place and together with ODIHR I intend to follow up with Moldova and discuss possibilities of future cooperation.

Australia, New Zealand and South Africa are additional countries to which we should turn. All of these countries have very successful and engaged Holocaust centres and/or museums, NGOs, Jewish communities, and political representatives very interested in cooperation with us. You will recall the speech that was delivered by the High Commissioner of Australia at the Toronto Plenary, expressing strong interest in IHRA and its work.

Another important partner is the Vatican. Former Chairs have for many years looked into possibilities to discuss the Vatican archives. I joined the former Chair, Dr Mario Silva, in a visit to the Vatican in January this year together with the Advisor to the IHRA and the Executive Secretary. During this visit contacts were made at various levels with a primary focus on how IHRA and the Vatican could mutually benefit from closer cooperation across the board. It was a fruitful visit in an open atmosphere and I shall certainly continue these efforts.

Further afield another country of potentially fruitful contact is China, where, quite apart from the wartime history of sheltering refugees from the Holocaust in Shanghai, there have been extensive teaching programmes on Holocaust and Jewish studies for over a decade.

Affiliation with IHRA

IHRA currently has three stages of membership: observer, liaison, and full member. Observer status is viewed as the first step to full membership. I intend to follow up on the debate initiated by Canada last year and circulate for discussion some suggestions about ways to develop relations with countries interested in the work of IHRA but not yet ready to contemplate an automatic expectation of eventual full membership. Meanwhile we already have a further expression of interest from El Salvador.

Grant Strategy

We shall have to decide upon our Grant Strategy at the May plenary. The discussion and decision will be mainly based on the discussion paper that was circulated for the Toronto plenary. We shall however adjust this paper based on an analysis of this years' experience as well as on the comments we have received from Working Groups and delegations.

In this respect I shall also submit to the membership a few ideas on how to increase IHRA's effectiveness in implementing projects and policies that will ensure continuous and sustainable programs according to the Stockholm Declaration.

Future Priorities

Finally, there seems to be an increasing consensus within the IHRA membership that in the first quarter of 2015, 15 years after the Stockholm Declaration and 70 years after the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau and the end of World War II, it might be time for a high-level political

reaffirmation of the Stockholm Declaration. This would ensure that Holocaust education, remembrance and research remains central to our mission, and that IHRA continues in particular to fight Holocaust denial and distortion wherever it may be found.

IHRA also needs to address the future more directly and the “solemn responsibility” accepted in Stockholm to fight the evils of genocide, ethnic cleansing, antisemitism and xenophobia. It is not for IHRA to take on the UN mantle of “responsibility to protect” (R2P), but the Chair is increasingly invited to share IHRA’s insights at conferences on genocide prevention where we can offer advice on early warning measures and how to preserve and protect societal values when they come under pressure.

Conclusion

All these ideas should help the Chair pull together a longer term strategy for IHRA which will set a direction for our work and that of our experts in the future, complementing the current Multi Year Work Plans. I am determined to support the Steering Committees in their work to achieve their goals and am looking forward to a discussion on the next steps.

I am planning a meeting in April with the Troika and Working Group representatives to prepare for the London Plenary in May. I shall welcome the thoughts of all other delegations. I want to create a process in which everyone can be involved, and I am determined to utilize the British Chairmanship year to reach out and widen IHRA’s influence. Our goal is to start including more countries who would benefit from our network and who will share our commitment to the Stockholm Declaration.

Sir Andrew Burns, UK Chair