



International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

6 December 2016. IHRA Chair, Amb. Mihnea Constantinescu, at the IHRA/UNESCO roundtable entitled “How to Respond to Antisemitism through Education, Culture and Communication?”

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address you today in my capacity as Chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

I would like to thank the Director General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, for the kind invitation to arrange this joint roundtable. I would also like to thank Senior Project Officer, Focal Point for Holocaust Education, Karel Fracapane, who is an important and long-standing member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance where he represents UNESCO.

I am very pleased that Advisor to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, Professor Steven Katz, is able to participate in the roundtable discussion on behalf of the IHRA today.

Our organization is the foremost international network uniting governments and experts to shape and advance Holocaust education, remembrance and research world-wide,

To speak out on Holocaust related issues including antisemitism,

And to uphold the commitments of the 2000 the Stockholm Declaration to which members are signatories and share a strong commitment.

Presently, IHRA is comprised of 31 member countries, eleven observer countries and seven permanent international partners, one of which is UNESCO.

In January 2000 in Stockholm a historic meeting of the representatives of 46 states took place: the Stockholm Forum on the Holocaust. This was where the IHRA began.

The Stockholm Declaration agreed upon at this meeting reads: “With humanity still scarred by genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, antisemitism and xenophobia, the international community shares a solemn responsibility to fight those evils.”

This sentiment remains as true today as it was in the year 2000.

Antisemitism is an ever-present evil and in this sense, as the Holocaust is not only a historical event but is of direct contemporary relevance to the security of present-day societies.

The Nazi persecution of the Jews began with hate speech, discrimination and dehumanizing language. Throughout the years we have learned that a society that tolerates such actions is susceptible to other forms of racism, hatred, and oppression.

IHRA has a number of Working Groups and special cross-country, cross-disciplinary committees focusing on issues of contemporary importance. One of the IHRA committees focuses exclusively on antisemitism and Holocaust denial. Twice a year, the Committee can speak directly to political representatives from ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs and Culture, facilitating opportunities to directly shape policy-making.

Notable IHRA successes include the adoption of a working definition on Holocaust denial and distortion and most recently, in May this year, at the IHRA Plenary in Bucharest, the adoption of a working definition of antisemitism.

The tragic events in recent years in Europe with antisemitic grounds indicate how important is to clearly identify a path towards preventing antisemitism. There must be clarity about what antisemitism actually is and how it can manifest itself. There must be clarity, so that ignorance cannot be offered as an excuse for a lack of principle and firmness.

By adopting the working definition on antisemitism, the IHRA is setting an example of responsible conduct for other international fora and hopes to inspire them to take further action.

I commend the OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office who will be seeking adoption of a working definition based on the one adopted by IHRA at its ministerial council in Hamburg next days.

When we in the IHRA are asked why we press to integrate the definitions we adopted on antisemitism and on Holocaust denial within larger framework of standards, our answer is clear: Because the mission of the IHRA is to bring to the attention of the world not just the memory of the past, but also our duty to the present. And therefore we must all identify the roots of hate, discrimination and exclusion that led to the tragedy of the Holocaust and to eradicate them for good, both on the European continent and globally.

This means access to education, openness to diversity, commitment to teaching young generations to respect human values and the undistorted history.

What could be more hideous than finding antisemitic messages mixed into far-right extremist or negationist discourse today in the public space, in the media and social media? What could be more dangerous to the fabric of our societies than to tolerate them spreading hate. And how is it possible to be indifferent to their effect on the minds and souls of our young people?

Teaching young generations to denounce and reject every form of extremism, intolerance, racism or antisemitism is a necessary achievement for shaping the future. More education for more responsible conduct in confronting these evils will eventually consolidate every society.

As I have mentioned, the IHRA is uniquely placed to take the lead on and progress Holocaust-related issues in the political arena. But we are convinced that by working in cooperation with other fora we will all be stronger.

This is why I am so pleased about this joint IHRA and UNESCO roundtable, with the involvement of other key stakeholders.

I thank you all for your contribution to maintaining the fight against antisemitism on the global agenda and for educating people to make our world a more secure and a more united place.

I wish you a productive debate.