



**The message of the IHRA Chair,
Ambassador Mihnea Constantinescu,
to the international conference ‘Forgotten Voices’
(Bucharest, 6-7 April 2016)**

It is a great pleasure for me to address you today in my capacity as Chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. I would like to thank Mr Raducanu, President of the European Roma and Travelers’ Forum for the invitation to speak here today. The IHRA is also pleased to have been able to support one of our partner organizations, the Council of Europe, in bringing about this important initiative.

Before I turn to talk about today’s conference, I would like to take a moment to explain the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance for those of you who are not too familiar with the organization. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, or the IHRA, is the only intergovernmental organization which seeks to put social and as political leaders’ support behind the need for Holocaust research, remembrance and education.

In simple terms, twice a year we bring together around 250 leading experts and policy-makers from more than 40 countries to discuss key Holocaust-related issues.

The inception of the organization finds itself in the schools of Sweden in the year 1997. In that year, Swedish Prime Minister Goeran Persson was much concerned by a poll conducted among high school children in his country, which seemed to show a lessened commitment to democratic values and a lack of knowledge about the Second World War. This poll was an indication that education about the Holocaust was failing to meet its target.

In light of this, Persson decided to bring together the representatives of 46 states with scholars, educators and survivors in Stockholm in the year 2000 to discuss the issue. The outcome of this meeting was the Stockholm Declaration and the formation of the unique 31 country network which exists today as the IHRA.

The Stockholm Declaration committed Governments to commemorating the victims of the Holocaust, to educating their populations and to supporting research to throw light on the still obscured shadows of the Holocaust.

One of these shadows is the genocide of the Roma. A long neglected part of Holocaust history, the topic is now being given increasing attention by academics and by political representatives.

This recognition has been slow in coming but the IHRA is pleased to see that things are beginning to change. As an example, on 27 January 2015 the 31 member countries of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance reaffirmed its founding document, the Stockholm Declaration. Notable was a line in the reaffirmation which read: "We are committed to remembering and honouring its victims, to upholding the terrible truth of the Holocaust, to standing up against those who distort or deny it and to combatting antisemitism, racism and prejudice against the Roma and Sinti."

This is a firm recognition of the obligation of governments today not only to commemorate the persecution of the Sinti and Roma but also to combat contemporary forms of discrimination.

The fact that we stand today here in the Parliament is a clear indication that it is not the responsibility of the persecuted groups to commemorate the victims.

It is the responsibility of the whole of humanity.

It is the responsibility of governments. It is the responsibility of every member of our societies.

The IHRA concretely contributes to raising awareness of the genocide of the Roma in a number of ways. The IHRA has a Committee on the Genocide of the Roma which brings together experts on the genocide of the Roma from IHRA member and observer countries to discuss teaching about the genocide, available research and appropriate forms of memorialisation.

I am pleased to see that a member of the IHRA Committee on the Genocide of the Roma, Gerhard Baumgartner, will address you all later this afternoon.

A unique element of the IHRA is that the Committee has direct access to the political level. Indeed four members of the IHRA Committee visited the Czech Republic in 2014 to discuss the genocide of the Roma and particularly the situation of the memorial site for the Roma victims in Lety u Písku.

The Committee on the Genocide of the Roma also carries out research projects and in 2015 they presented [an annotated bibliography](#) on the genocide of the Roma, with more than 1400 titles, and an [overview](#) of international organizations working on historical and contemporary issues connected to the genocide of the Roma. The annotated bibliography is the first to be completed on the genocide of the Roma since 1989. Both are available on the IHRA website and should act as reference

The IHRA chose to support this conference under its grant programme because of its focus on the history of the genocide of the Roma within the context of the Holocaust, as well as education strategies which use history as a means of combatting anti-Roma sentiment in present-day society.

The conference seeks to make a clear link to the present discrimination of the Roma, seeking to explore how the causes of that tragedy are reflected in the discrimination, marginalization and persecution of the Roma today.

The target groups of this conference are another important factor in the IHRA's decision to fund it: political-decision makers (European, national, regional and local authorities, members of Parliament), civil servants and civil society (Roma organisations and mediators, anti-discrimination bodies, informal education organisations, religious leaders, journalists). The selected target groups are high level multipliers and are in a position to influence events, bring change and modify mentalities. This is exactly the type of initiative the IHRA seeks to support: sustainable projects, which cross borders and bring about last change.

I thank you again for the opportunity to address you here today and am sure that the next days will be filled with thought-provoking presentations.