



International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Conference

***Refugee policies from 1933 until today:
Challenges and responsibilities***

Palazzo della Cancelleria, 16 February 2017, 18:00

Opening Remarks

H.E. Archbishop Paul R. Gallagher
Secretary for the Holy See's Relations with States

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, first, let me express a warm welcome to everyone. I am delighted to greet you today to this beautiful and historic Palazzo, which is a little piece of Vatican territory in the heart of Rome, on the occasion of the opening of the Conference organized by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in collaboration with the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

In particular, I would like to greet H.E. Ambassador Mihnea Constantinescu, Chair of IHRA who dedicated time and energy in organising this Conference, together with H.E. Ambassador Liviu-Petru Zăpîrțan, the Ambassador of Romania to the Holy See, and the staff of the Embassy of Romania to the Holy See.

I also wish to greet Dr. Kathrin Meyer, Executive Secretary to IHRA and Prof. Steven T. Katz, Advisor to IHRA, and Fr. Norbert Hoffman, SDB, Secretary of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and the Holy See's contact person with IHRA. And finally, I also greet my colleague Archbishop Silvano Tomasi who will deliver the Keynote Speech this evening.

This Conference represents a major collaboration between the Holy See and IHRA on an issue that has been close to Pope Francis's heart since the very beginning of his pontificate. We hope that this conference will be an important contribution to addressing the various refugee crises that have been engulfing the world over the last few years and raise awareness about the realities of their suffering, and more importantly, bring about solutions. Before doing so, however, I would like to say a few words about IHRA and the Holy See in the context of Catholic-Jewish relations.

1. IHRA

For almost twenty years, since it was established in Stockholm on 7 May 1998, through the initiative of the former Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) has focused on Holocaust **education, remembrance** and **research**. During its activities, it has addressed important topics such as antisemitism and Holocaust denial, the situation of the Roma and the Roma genocide, comparative genocide, Holocaust education, and promoting Holocaust Memorial Days.

These topics are of interest for the Holy See which follows with special attention the work of IHRA. Indeed, the presence of Holy See representatives at IHRA Plenary meetings in the past few years, in the United Kingdom, in Hungary and in Romania, and the designation of a contact person in February

2015, are concrete signs of the Holy See's interest and appreciation for IHRA's work, in the context of Catholic-Jewish relations.

2. Catholic-Jewish Relations

In 2015, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, the document that heralded a new springtime, a veritable thaw, of Catholic-Jewish relations and dialogue. This document, promulgated on 28 October 1965, states explicitly, and unequivocally, the Catholic Church's attitude towards anti-Semitism: "*The Church repudiates all persecutions against any man. Moreover, mindful of her common patrimony with the Jews, and motivated by the gospel's spiritual love and by no political considerations, she deplores the hatred, persecutions, and displays of anti-Semitism directed against Jews at any time and from any source*" (*Nostra Aetate*, n. 4).

Another important step in this dialogue was the establishment, in 1974, of the ***Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews in order to promote and foster dialogue with the Jewish people on a global level***. Among the most important topics of the work of this *Commission* is the question of how to combat anti-Semitism and education about the Holocaust. As an entity of the Holy See, it is not the task of the Commission to organise commemorations for the whole Catholic Church, rather it is to establish the theoretical framework for dealing with Holocaust issues and to produce general guidelines for the Catholic Church that may be of use, at the local and national levels, for the development of concrete measures for education and Holocaust remembrance initiatives.

I would like to mention briefly two important documents on Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. First, the Commission's 1985 document entitled *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and*

Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church. This document referred explicitly to the phenomenon of anti-Semitism, which sadly is always ready to reappear under different guises, and thus it called for the urgency and importance of “*precise, objective and rigorously accurate teaching on Judaism*”.

The other significant document, coincidentally issued in the same year that IHRA was founded in 1998, was the Commission’s document entitled *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah*. On the occasion of its publication, which he had desired expressly, Pope John Paul II, who, in 1979, had been the first Pope to visit Auschwitz, wrote that “*on numerous occasions during my Pontificate, I have recalled with a sense of deep sorrow the sufferings of the Jewish people during the Second World War. The crime which become known as the Shoah remains and indelible stain on...history*” (Cfr. *Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II on the occasion of the Publication of the Document “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah,”* 12 March 1998).

At Auschwitz, Pope John Paul II knelt and prayed in silence for the victims of the Holocaust. He also prayed at the Yad Vashem memorial, during his visit to the Holy Land in 2000. These powerful acts of prayer and commemoration were also made by Pope Benedict XVI (at Auschwitz in 2006 and at Yad Vashem in 2009) and Pope Francis (at Auschwitz in 2016 and at Yad Vashem in 2014), thus confirming the Church’s commitment, at its highest level, to remembering the *Shoah*.

Why this commitment to remembering the *Shoah*? The document *We Remember* offers two basic reasons. First, in the face of such evil and injustice, ‘*no one can remain indifferent*’. Our shared humanity demands of us not to be ‘*indifferent*’. More than that, however, the Church cannot remain indifferent “*by reason of her very close bonds of spiritual kinship with the Jewish people*”. Thus, in many countries (for example, Italy, Austria, Poland,

the Netherlands, Switzerland), Bishops' Conferences have introduced a "*Day of Judaism*" in order to commemorate the victims of the *Shoah* and to draw attention to the Jewish roots of the Christian faith and the progress made in Jewish-Catholic dialogue. In this regard, we can mention the annual commemorations of the "*Kristallnacht*" on 9 November and the liberation of Auschwitz on 27 January.

But there is also a **second reason**, recalled often by John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Pope Francis: **we remember the *Shoah* in order that it may never be repeated again**. Speaking to the members of the delegation of the "Conference of European Rabbis", on 20 April 2015, Pope Francis described the great tragedy of the *Shoah* that took place in the heart of Europe as "***a warning to present and future generations***". More recently, this past 27 January, when he received a delegation of the European Jewish Congress, and last week, on 9 February, when he received a delegation of the Anti-Defamation League, he stressed once again the importance of remembering past tragedies so that they may not be repeated. Moreover we have to promote the "*culture of encounter and reconciliation*" that engenders life and gives rise to hope, in contrast to the "non-culture" of hate that sows death and reaps despair. "*To this end, let us continue to help one another,*" he said "*as Pope John Paul II desired, 'to enable memory to play its necessary part in the process of shaping a future in which the unspeakable iniquity of the Shoah will never again be possible'* (Letter on the Occasion of the Publication of the Document "*We Remember: a Reflection on the Shoah*", 12 March 1998): ***a future of genuine respect for the life and dignity of every people and every human being***" (Pope Francis, Address to the Delegation of the Anti-Defamation League, 9 February 2017).

In all of these remarks, there is a clear and unequivocal message: we must learn from the lessons of the past, so that ‘Never again!’ may be our constant refrain and objective. We remember, so that we may build together a better future.

I have referred to just a few of the more recent encounters of Pope Francis with some Jewish groups, but there are many other similar occasions, with previous Popes, and also at the national and local levels of the Church, which indicate the fruitful ongoing dialogue between Catholics and Jews. While IHRA, of course, is not a Jewish organisation, but an Alliance of governments committed to Holocaust education, remembrance and education, the Holy See values its relationship with IHRA, in the context of Catholic-Jewish dialogue and cooperation, that seeks to promote a culture of encounter and collaboration in facing the problems of today’s world.

3. Refugee policies, Challenges and Responsibilities

Thus, this Conference is an expression of our common desire to learn from the lessons of the past, so that we may respond better to the actual refugee crisis, as well as the phenomenon of migration, that have reached new levels, in part because of wars and conflicts that have deprived people of hope for a better future. In fact, it is precisely the memory and experience of the past, and in particular, the past tragedy of the Jewish people that urges us to work to ensure that such a tragedy is never repeated to any group of people. Thus, the phenomenon of refugees needs to be grounded in the realisation that every human life is sacred and inviolable and needs to be defended.

Down through the years, the Holy See has focussed on the humanitarian aspect of the refugee crisis, but it has also focussed on welcoming refugees and their integration in their host countries, by intervening with the local Churches and governments, and seeking always a culture of dialogue and

mutual understanding that respects human life as sacred and inviolable. The moral authority of the Pope and the Apostolic See has constantly been recognised and this has been demonstrated by the frequent appeals of International organisations requesting help and interventions in various situations.

The action of the Holy See, however, is not limited to the aforementioned aspects: in fact, the Holy See has always urged facing the root causes that give rise to refugees in the first place and, in this regard, the Holy See has constantly made appeals for peace and reconciliation in an effort to prevent humanitarian crises. Moreover, in following the Social Doctrine of the Church, the Popes have unceasingly reaffirmed the importance of integral human development, the equitable distribution of goods and the fight against injustice.

It is my hope, therefore, that this Conference, by reflecting on the themes proposed, and in the light of the memories and the experiences of the past, may help bring forth new responses to current challenges.

Thank you for your kind attention.