



INTERNATIONAL
**HOLOCAUST
REMEMBRANCE**
ALLIANCE

30 March 2018

Address by IHRA Chair, Ambassador Sandro De Bernardin at the Concert about Job

Ladies and gentlemen,

In *If This Is a Man* – the book he wrote about his terrible experience in Birkenau – Primo Levi reports on a recurrent nightmare of deportees: to survive, to go back home, to tell their stories and to not be believed. That nightmare often came true. Today in many countries doubts are cast on the events of the Holocaust. Denial, distortion, trivialization are insidious dangers that risk polluting our societies.

The Stockholm Declaration, signed almost 20 years ago, is the manifesto by which 31 countries commit themselves to standing up for the truth of what happened. As IHRA Chair in 2018, I am glad and proud to welcome you here tonight, in the heart of the capital of Italy, because you are the representatives of those committed countries, you are the brains and souls behind this commitment.

I especially, wish to thank you for your hard work over the last days to give substance to our common ambition to increase the impact of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Under the guidance of the Swiss Chair – and I take this opportunity to thank His Excellency Ambassador Giancarlo Kessler for participating in the organization of this event, thereby stressing the continuity of the Swiss and the Italian Chairmanships – last year the IHRA identified its priority theme for the near future: to safeguard the record of the Shoah and to counter distortion in historical discourse.

We must enhance efforts to safeguard the testimonies of survivors, the sites that witnessed their suffering, and the museums and memorials that record their stories.



We must ensure that the education of younger generations duly include the events of the Holocaust, which challenged the foundations of civilization. After the Shoah nothing was – or will be – as before.

Throughout the years, the IHRA has worked to produce effective tools and propose best practices, to cultivate Holocaust Remembrance and to combat modern antisemitism. Now it is for governments of our member countries to make best use of these tools, because new generations deserve the truth.

Indeed, historical truth is a public good. It is our duty to leave our children not only a material heritage – like clean water, natural resources, a non-polluted environment. Equally necessary – and maybe even more necessary – to them will be a moral heritage, that allow men to live together in peace and dignity. So, our voice must be heard every time we detect, anywhere, anticipatory signs of the “*sleep of reason that produces monsters*”.

In our “global” world, no country alone can win the battle to safeguard these moral resources. Just as when it comes to managing economic problems, also in this case a multinational, coordinated effort is required. Indeed, historical truth is a common, transnational good. It is our common duty to defend freedom of research – as we defend freedom of speech – everywhere we see it faltering.

Ladies and gentlemen,

2018 marks the 80th anniversary of a number of crucial events: in Italy the issue of the racial laws; in Europe the Evian Conference, the Munich Agreement and the November Pogrom. Let us not miss this opportunity to reflect on how and why 80 years ago things went wrong.

Today the IHRA has a special mission in acting as a watchman for the international community, because we have a special knowledge of what went wrong in the past, when the international community failed to recognize the signs of the times. This is the special task of the members of the IHRA: to ensure that awareness prevails over ignorance, responsibility over indifference.

In doing so, the IHRA can rely on extra-ordinary assets: the synergy among academia, educators, government officials and diplomats; the joint commitment of Jews and non-Jews. This blend of different good wills is indicative of the universal signification of the Shoah: a scar that cannot be deleted from the face of mankind.



This is why we are here tonight: we are here to attend a performance that is a meditation on the biblical character of Job, who is the universal epitome of the righteous suddenly deprived of everything, of the innocent destroyed by Evil.

The author of this performance, Yuval Avital, is an Israeli composer who has been living and working in Italy for many years. The Italian Chair is grateful to him for choosing this IHRA event for the world *première* of his latest work.

Likewise, I am grateful to Marilena Francese and Viviana Kassam who organized this event and, again, H.E. the Ambassador of Switzerland in Rome for his support.

I wish you a pleasant evening and a fruitful Plenary meeting tomorrow.

Thank you.