

Ambassador Sandro De Bernardin, IHRA Chair

Panel 1: Good practices of addressing intolerance and discrimination

Ladies and Gentleman,

My **thanks** to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to Director Gísladóttir for the invitation to participate in this important conference.

When thinking about good practices in addressing intolerance and discrimination, I believe the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (**IHRA**) **presents an interesting example of good practice in itself.**

The IHRA is an intergovernmental organization that **unites political representatives and experts** to strengthen, advance and promote Holocaust education, research and remembrance.

Twice a year we bring together more than 300 experts and political representatives, providing an open platform to deal with specific aspects of intolerance and discrimination, namely antisemitism and Holocaust Denial. We operate by consensus.

The momentum for the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance grew from a **historic meeting** at heads-of-government level, convened in Stockholm by Prime Minister Goran Persson, and the “Stockholm Declaration” that was agreed upon there on 28 January 2000.

The high-level representation at that Forum to discuss Holocaust issues was and remains unprecedented. It was an acknowledgment that Holocaust remembrance – just like antisemitism – is **not an issue only for Jews**, but an issue for the international community as a whole.

Persson’s intuition was to unite policy-makers with those actually teaching the subject and working on the ground. So, national delegates to the IHRA consist not

only of government representatives, but also of educators, representatives from Holocaust-related memorials and museums, and Holocaust survivors.

IHRA now consist of **31 member countries, 9 observer countries and 2 liaison countries**. The Heads of the Delegations usually come from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, sometimes from the Ministries of Education or Culture.

The IHRA bi-annual meetings offer a **unique platform** for experts and diplomats to interact, insofar as

- (a) **concerned experts** have access to their **own government** officials and, through them, can raise their concerns either in an international forum or bilaterally, via their embassies;
- (b) **experts** from 31 member countries come **together** to raise their concerns with one voice;
- (c) **government officials** from different countries can use the sidelines of the meetings to discuss with **each other**.

The structure of the IHRA reflects our belief that a **coordinated, international effort** on antisemitism and Holocaust Denial is required to achieve sustainable, lasting change and ensure high standards.

And while the IHRA is not a legally binding organization, we must not underestimate the **power of a consensus decisions**.

A crucial “best practice” of the IHRA is the **regular reflection on** the situation in each Member Country, through periodic Country Reports.

Another specific feature of the IHRA *modus operandi* is **flexibility**. IHRA strives to influence the situation in a given country both through confidential moral suasion and public statements.

Until the year 2016, our member countries faced the challenge that there was not an agreed definition of antisemitism. By the way of consequence, not **all hate crime that was antisemitic in nature would be recorded as antisemitic**.

So, an important step in this fight against antisemitism was the adoption by the IHRA of a **Working Definition of Antisemitism on 26 May, 2016**. This non legally-binding definition is meant to guide the organization in its work.

Indeed, in order to combat antisemitism effectively, it is **important to have clarity** about what antisemitism is and how it may manifest itself.

The IHRA tool captures antisemitism in its developmental stages and mutations, **reflects current realities** and is of practical use. It seeks to educate and inspire dialogue on forms of antisemitism: from antisemitism that emerges from hateful intent to unconscious forms of discrimination, as well as subsequent antisemitic actions that deny rights or a feeling of safety and security to Jews and people identified as Jews.

Since the IHRA adoption, **eight national governments** have formally adopted or endorsed the working definition, as a reference point for their educators, law enforcers and judiciary.

Another challenge is the fact that there are **different reporting standards** used in the various countries and international organizations. This is the reason why it is hard to get a grasp of antisemitism across the EU, across the OSCE, and across the UN.

I would urge concerned international organizations to cooperate for the **development of uniform reporting standards**, to allow policymakers to understand rates of antisemitism in their own countries and in our international community better. This can support the development of more effective policies to combat antisemitism.

To sum up and conclude:

- 1) Many countries confront common challenges domestically. Overcoming these challenges can often benefit from **sharing knowledge and coordinating action** at the intergovernmental level.
- 2) **Political will does not spring from itself alone.** Experts' input is essential. International meetings provide a crucial impulse: words spent there matter.
- 3) By sharing practices and by making those practices visible and accessible to decision-makers, the IHRA intend to ensure accurate and sensitive remembrance of history with a view to **informing the policymaking of today.**
- 4) The IHRA's working definition of antisemitism approved in 2016 and the working definition of Holocaust denial and distortion approved in 2013 provide sound **starting points** for addressing these issues at the national level.
- 5) The methodology developed by the IHRA to tackle intolerance and discrimination against Jews can constitute **a model** for tackling other forms of intolerance and discrimination around the world.