



International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

27 January 2016. IHRA Chair Szabolcs Takács at the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust, United Nations, New York.

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor to have been invited to the United Nations' Holocaust Commemoration event and to have the possibility to address you in my capacity as the Chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), an intergovernmental body of 31 member countries and 10 affiliated countries.

I am pleased to see a number of IHRA colleagues here today, including the Head of the German Delegation to the IHRA, Ambassador Felix Klein.

Representing this special organization on a unique occasion at the United Nations underlines the importance of responsible states facing up to the tragedy that occurred more than 70 years ago, during the Second World War.

This world-shattering event is the *raison d'être* of the United Nations as well as of the IHRA: the birth of both organizations was closely linked to the realization by state leaders that stable and institutionalized cooperation between states is fundamental in preventing another conflict such as the Second World War and another genocide such as the Holocaust.

When I read the theme of the commemoration this year - "the Holocaust and Human Dignity" - an image came to my mind, a scene, which is likely to be well-known to all of you.

That image was of the streets of Vienna in 1938. Shortly after the annexation of Austria, a crowd gathered. They formed a circle around a group of people who were scrubbing the streets with short-bristled brushes. They crouched self-consciously on the pavement, some sitting awkwardly trying to stop their clothes from getting dirty. We see flashes of uniforms in the crowd, but also civilians. Men. Women. Children. There is confusion, unease on some faces. Amusement, laughter on others.

This is certainly not the most violent image of the Holocaust that I have seen. Nor the most gruesome. But such scenes have a horror of their own: they depict the active attempt to humiliate, to degrade. They show open disregard for human dignity. And of course we view such scenes through the lens of what we know was to come: discrimination and humiliation as a prelude to murder.

It was with the Holocaust at the forefront of their minds, that the Drafting Committee of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights enshrined the inherent dignity of each human being in the very first line.

They had recognised that at the root of all crimes against humanity, there is a disregard for the intrinsic value of a human being.

Because after Auschwitz we saw racist slurs and dehumanizing language differently.

Because before the Holocaust stole lives or livelihoods, it tried to corrode dignity.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights protects the rights that the Nazis and their collaborators trampled.

It proclaims to the world that all human beings are born free and equal.

It sets out in black and white that everyone has the right to family life, to own property, to freedom of thought.

The Holocaust was not the first act of genocide. Nor was it to be the last.

But the Holocaust was unprecedented not only in its scale of killing civilians but also in its character and intention.

The Holocaust marked a breakdown of civilization of such magnitude that humankind was compelled – obligated – to act.

Essentially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights made the international community responsible for protecting the dignity of the citizens of the world.

It was a similar idea of a shared international responsibility that led to the creation of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

In 1997, then Swedish Prime Minister Goeran Persson was concerned by a poll conducted in Sweden, which seemed to show that high school children had little knowledge of the Holocaust.

Barely half a century after the horror of the Holocaust, Auschwitz, Treblinka, Sobibor were beginning to fade into history. To disappear from collective memory.

Recognizing the crucial need for a coordinated, international effort on Holocaust-related issues, Persson brought together the representatives of 46 states with scholars, educators and survivors to attend the Stockholm Forum in the year 2000. The outcome of this meeting was the Stockholm Declaration and the formation of the unique network, which exists today as the IHRA.

The IHRA is the foremost network of political leaders and professionals advancing and shaping Holocaust education, remembrance and research in the international arena.

The IHRA aims to demonstrate the relevance the history of the Holocaust holds for the world today and to promote and uphold the commitments enshrined in the Stockholm Declaration.

The foundation of the IHRA sent a clear signal to the world that it was not only the responsibility of Jewish communities and civil society to remember the murdered. It was also the responsibility of governments. Of the whole of humanity.

In awareness of the fact that the Holocaust is an international issue and one of contemporary political importance, the IHRA convenes experts and diplomats in a global network.

The IHRA network is a place for experts to share best practices. It is a place for experts to share their concerns on Holocaust-related issues directly with the political level. And it is a place for countries to reflect critically on their own history and strive for more appropriate, more inclusive forms of remembrance and memorialization.

IHRA's 31 member countries and ten observer countries work to take concrete steps to ensure that 'never again' is not just a platitude.

Member countries commit themselves to establishing a national Holocaust memorial day, to incorporating Holocaust education in national curricula, and to ensuring that Holocaust-related issues are kept firmly on the political agenda.

I would like to provide you with one recent example of the unquestionable need for an intergovernmental organization to further Holocaust-related issues. Over the last years the IHRA has been following the development of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation with great concern.

Reports from researchers rang alarm bells: archives were denying access to documents based on a Regulation that had not yet even been passed.

So with began years of efforts from the IHRA, harnessing the strength of its academic and political experts, to lobby for a specific exclusion in the Regulation for documents bearing on the Holocaust. During the Hungarian Chairmanship, in December 2015, we succeeded in securing this exclusion thereby safeguarding the future of Holocaust research for generations to come.

This achievement is unique in the 15-year history of the IHRA. For the first time the organization enforced its principles and objectives on EU draft legislation that directly affects all EU citizens.

This issue needed to be tackled at the level of the European Union. The IHRA was the only organization in a position to recognize and fight for this exclusion. The consequences of overseeing this danger would have been disastrous.

By safeguarding Holocaust research, IHRA facilitates uncovering the still obscured shadows of the Holocaust. Discovering unknown fates, better

understanding events and giving individuals back their identity honours the dignity of survivors and victims.

Returning to that pavement on that bleak day in Vienna in 1938, can tell us many things of relevance to today's world.

It tells us that discrimination, antisemitism and xenophobia are threats to civilization.

It tells us of the importance of protecting human rights.

It tells us of the early warning signs of genocide.

But above all, it tells us of the dangers of not actively respecting and protecting the untouchable dignity of each and every individual human being.

Today as we commemorate the victims of the Holocaust, I- as the Hungarian Chair of the IHRA- solemnly remember that every tenth victim of the Shoah, 600 thousand people, were Hungarians.

The Hungarian Government considers that during the Holocaust, the Hungarian nation died 600 thousand times and that every Hungarian who killed or collaborated committed high treason against the Hungarian nation.

Violent physical attacks on Jews and rising antisemitism throughout Europe in recent years pose a direct threat to democracy, to the basic values of our civilisation and to the overall security of our societies.

The task of the international community; be it of the IHRA, the UN or the EU is clear: challenges such as antisemitism, human rights abuses must be boldly and swiftly tackled. Should these threats prevail, we shall face insurmountable problems of insecurity, fear and social tensions within our own societies.

From the Holocaust, the world can see what happens when such problems are not internationally addressed.

The IHRA believes that remembrance and education, assisted by research, are the best tools to face our past.

Today we remember and we take responsibility for the future.

I would warmly invite countries not already affiliated with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance to be part of that future by joining our network.

Thank you.