

**Plenary Meeting
Vienna, 14 -17 December 2008**

Introductory Statement by
Ambassador Ferdinand Trauttmansdorff
Chairman of the ITF

Held after the Opening remarks by the President and Speaker of the Austrian Parliament, Ms. Barbara Prammer, at the Plenary session of the ITF, Vienna, 16 December 2008.

Thank you very much Madame President. We really appreciate all you have done for the Task Force by offering us the chance to hold our meeting at the premises of the Parliament. We are even more grateful as we now also better understand your motives for doing so. We wish to thank you also for all your additional support for our work. This includes your assistance to arrange the invitation to hold our Spring Plenary Session in Linz, which is the Capital of your native Federal Province. This also includes your support for the efforts of the members of our delegations in their different fields on the national level, where political support is still of great importance.

Since this is the second and last Plenary under the Austrian Chairmanship I wish to quickly take a few minutes and bore you with a few rather basic remarks.

Recently a journalist wondered how Austria, with, in his eyes, such a bad record in the field of Holocaust remembrance and combating Anti-Semitism, could ever have been offered the honour of serving as Chairman of the Holocaust Task Force. My reply was and is rather simple one and I hope that the participants of the Plenary feel in a position to basically endorse this view.

I wish to confirm that we, from the very beginning, considered it a great honour for all of us to serve as the team in the Chair of this great organization. At the same time this team are the last ones to deny that Austria has no impeccable record in the field of the goals of this organisation as set out in the Stockholm declaration. We are painfully aware of the shortcomings of the past, during which Austria claimed to be the first victim of Nazi aggression and as such took little or no responsibility for the crimes committed during the Holocaust. Thanks God this attitude has changed in the meantime. We are also aware of the shortcomings of the present. Practically all members of our delegation are trying to deal with them on a daily basis with all the frustrations but also the occasional modest triumphs involved. Yes, we still have to ask ourselves questions regarding the relevance and effects of these efforts, if the

majority of our young voters, either out of mere frustration with the government or of ignorance or perhaps both, are not giving enough weight to concerns that their vote might encourage political forces that have a doubtful attitude towards recognizing the full extent of the Shoah and who's discriminatory attitudes raise serious concerns regarding Anti-Semitism in particular and racism in general.

So, my answer to the journalist's question is: Holocaust education, remembrance and research, combating Anti-Semitism and the related communication work is not the task of Jews alone, nor is it just the privilege of a few righteous individuals or governments. It is the task of each and everyone. It is a task of governments, political forces, individuals and organisations and particularly of those countries and societies that have not yet done their full home work in facing the full extent of the Holocaust and all its consequences and that have not yet successfully wiped out extremist and discriminatory attitudes including Anti-Semitism. This Task Force is the organization where we can freely acknowledge our deficiencies since it is our common endeavour to face and overcome them. This is what we mean by mainstreaming the culture of Holocaust remembrance as one of the main challenges for the ITF now and in the difficult years to come.

We fully acknowledge that we Austrians, while appreciating all the efforts and achievements particularly those in recent years, have still a long way to go in fully meeting the heavy responsibility of our past and of fully drawing, as a society, the right conclusions for our present and the future. It probably is a task that never ends. We do not wish to take this road alone. We want to be a partner to all those, who share our problems in one way or another. It is not shameful to have problems including revisionist attitudes and endemic Anti-Semitism, it is even less shameful to acknowledge such problems, but it is shameful to do nothing or too little about them.

While raising awareness is very important, finger pointing is not only unhelpful but it is rather aggravating the problems and makes the efforts of those, who are fighting to improve the situation, often considerably more difficult.

This is where the ITF can become and has become a highly valuable partner. It is our network of expertise and experience that can really help improving each member country's efforts towards promoting Holocaust education, remembrance and research and thus contributing to the combat against Anti-Semitism, extremism, discrimination and all those attitudes that, as the tragedy of this unprecedented genocide shows, lead to crimes against humanity and the worst violations of human rights and dignity.

By consolidating its structure and establishing a Permanent Secretariat this organisation is now ready for a more strategic approach to the tasks ahead. The Amsterdam initiative has paved the way. The problems we presently face with handling the PPA's is also a big chance to improve the effects of the work of the ITF in our societies, particularly by sharing our experiences and by spreading our network of communication and co-operation. Therefore, we will have to quickly produce clear rules for the funding of future projects while untying the hands of our structures to face the increasing challenges for our work.

Now, we have to endeavour to increase the visibility of the ITF and to sharpen its profile.

With the economic crisis becoming a reality not only in Europe and the United States, first signs of increasing readiness for violence and extremism have appeared. This requires not only vigilance but political action on the national and international level. Cultivating consciousness about the horrors of the Holocaust and its origins may become more important than before. This became probably the main immediate challenge for our Task Force. But we cannot do it alone. We have to join hands with international organisations and do more in order to reach out to NGO's. In the wake of the progrom-commemoration we tried to make a first step. But we have to continue.

If our common endeavours during our Chairmanship will, in the final account, have laid a few stones paving the way into this direction, we will be really happy and proud. We are not yet proud of our record in facing our Holocaust past. We still have a long way to go. But we are proud, if the service that we try to humbly provide to the Task Force through assuming our Chairmanship role in a dedicated manner, is contributing a little to strengthening our organisation. Because in the difficult years ahead, we will need the Task Force more than ever before.