

A Guide to Understanding:

**THE INTERNATIONAL
HOLOCAUST
REMEMBRANCE
ALLIANCE &
DEFINING
ANTISEMITISM**

The World Jewish Congress is the internationally recognized representative body of Jewish communities in more than 100 countries across six continents, working on their behalf with foreign governments, international organizations, law enforcement agencies, and at the grassroots level to: combat antisemitism, bigotry, xenophobia, and extremism; support Israel and advance Middle East peace; safeguard Jewish security; advocate on issues of international human rights; preserve and perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust; promote and enhance Jewish unity and interfaith relations; and nurture future generations of Jewish leadership.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance: A world that remembers the Holocaust

HISTORY

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), initiated by Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson in May 1998, is an international alliance composed of 34 member countries dedicated to uniting governments and experts to advance, and promote Holocaust education, remembrance, and research worldwide and to upholding the commitments of the 2000 Stockholm Declaration and the 2020 IHRA Ministerial Declaration. Originally founded as the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, the IHRA has been an international leader in Holocaust education and remembrance since its formation.

Prime Minister Persson was inspired to create the organization, along with a domestic Swedish initiative, following his trip to the Neuengamme concentration camp in Hamburg, Germany, and against the backdrop of increased questioning among Swedes about the validity of the Holocaust and its horrors.

Persson selected Director-General of the Swedish Foreign Office Ulf Hjertsonsson to oversee the initial steps of the Task Force's formation. On 7 May 1998, delegations from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Sweden – led by President Bill Clinton, Prime Minister Tony Blair, and Prime Minister Persson, respectively – **established** the international body during a meeting in Stockholm.

At the conclusion of the May 1998 meeting, the delegation agreed to “collaborate closely with NGOs and others active in disseminating knowledge about the Holocaust,” as well as to “focus international cooperation on Holocaust educational activities, public activities, testimonies of survivors, to find proper ways to reach out to young people, to launch a global survey on Holocaust education to be presented in national reports and cooperation on how to use the Internet in connection with these activities.”

Later that year, Germany, Israel, and Poland also joined the alliance, followed by the Netherlands, Poland, France, and Italy, in 1999.

In the wake of the seminal Stockholm meeting, Persson proposed creating a large international forum of interested governments to discuss Holocaust education. Overseeing the planning of the forum was a Swedish governmental committee, as well as Israeli historian and scholar of the Holocaust Yehuda Bauer, who was invited to serve as the committee's academic head. The forum convened for several days in late January 2000, notably on 27 January, the 55th anniversary of the

Liberation of Auschwitz. Twenty-three heads of government and 14 deputy prime ministers attended the forum, a notable increase in international participation since the inception of the initiative.

The participants selected professor and Nobel Prize laureate Elie Wiesel as the Honorary Chairman of the conference. During his keynote address at the conference, Prime Minister Persson **explained**, “It happened once. It should not have happened but it did. It must not happen again, but it could.”

At the conference, participatory countries unanimously adopted the Stockholm Declaration, which **outlined** principles to “inspire and guide the peoples of the world in the preservation and enhancement of the human environment.” This declaration would become known as the founding document of the alliance.

The declaration consists of eight short paragraphs obligating the now 34 member countries of the IHRA to engage in Holocaust education, remembrance, and research. The Declaration, as well as additional obligations, would be reaffirmed 20 years later, on 19 January 2020, with the adoption of the **2020 IHRA Ministerial Declaration**.

Since the monumental Stockholm Forum in 2000, the IHRA’s membership has grown to 34 member countries, 1 liaison country, 7 observer countries and 8 international permanent partner organizations. All IHRA members undergo a **peer-review** via a country reporting mechanism every seven years to evaluate their compliance with the Stockholm Declaration and other IHRA commitments.

Each country has delegates which represent relevant government ministries, and academic institutions (Holocaust museums and memorials, and civil society, inter alia.). Twice a year, all IHRA delegates come together for the IHRA plenary meetings. The forum thus constitutes a unique setting in which officials and experts from around the world can come together, explore collaborative projects, and exchange ideas and best practices regarding Holocaust education.

The Presidency of the IHRA is **held** by a different member country every year. The chairing country hosts the IHRA’s plenary meetings, where the IHRA’s decision-making body – known as the Plenary – traditionally makes public comments on significant developments regarding Holocaust education and the fight against antisemitism. Recent Presidencies have included Switzerland (2017), Italy (2018) and Luxembourg (2019).

Germany assumed the Presidency of the IHRA in March 2020, with Ambassador Michaela Küchler, the German Foreign Office’s Special Commissioner for Relations with Jewish Organizations, Holocaust Remembrance, Antisemitism, and International Affairs Relating to Sinti and Roma, heading the team.

In remarks at the **official handover ceremony** at the House of Representatives in Berlin, Ambassador Küchler emphasized that Holocaust remembrance “has no end... We will preserve the memory of the victims and survivors forever. We will do everything we can to ensure that the legacy of the murdered men, women, and children remains inscribed in the memory of humanity.” Upcoming Presidencies include Greece (2021) and Sweden (2020).

Read IHRA’s Handbook for the practical use of the IHRA working definition of antisemitism

STRUCTURE

The IHRA has also established several 'Working Groups' and 'Committees' which cultivate deep collective understanding of the causes and history of the Holocaust and the genocide of Roma. These bodies also collect and distribute research on the best ways of commemorating the Holocaust and teaching the subject to future generations. In addition to the IHRA's focus on the Holocaust, the organization works to combat contemporary manifestations of antisemitism and other forms of racism and discrimination.

The Academic Working Group promotes Holocaust research and international cooperation on that research. Affiliated project groups encourage member countries to commit to opening Holocaust-related archives. The group also identifies and discusses key academic developments in the field of the Holocaust.

The Education Working Group (EWG) develops **guidelines** for teachers to provide support on the subject of Holocaust education. The resources, which are available in numerous languages, were completed over the course of several years. The resources include a set of guidelines breaking down the why, what, and how of the Holocaust. However, the EWG group has expanded their resources to a number of other topics including "Teaching about the Holocaust without Survivors," and "Preparing Holocaust Memorial Days."

The Memorials and Museums Working Group provides support and expertise to Holocaust memorials and museums, as well as to those in need of preservation.

In addition to their membership in working groups, delegates may also participate in three select committees: The Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial; the Committee on the Genocide of the Roma; and the Committee on the Holocaust, Genocide, and Crimes Against Humanity.

The formation of the Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial in 2009 was a significant moment for the IHRA as it expanded the alliance's focus from Holocaust remembrance to the contemporary challenges of Holocaust denial and distortion, and current forms of antisemitism. In cooperation with governmental representatives from IHRA member countries, the Committee developed its non-binding Working Definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion and Working Definition of Antisemitism, both critical advances in giving a universal delineation to global problems.

The Committee on the Genocide of the Roma **promotes** education, research and remembrance related to the genocide of Roma by Nazi Germany and its collaborators, and engages in contemporary issues such as hate speech and discrimination against Roma. In 2014, the Committee initiated two research projects: an annotated bibliography of academic publications on the genocide of the Roma, and an overview of international organizations working to promote education about the injustices of the Roma genocide.

The Committee on the Holocaust, Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity provides guidance on good practices on how to bring the Holocaust in conversation with other genocides throughout history without diminishing their specificities. To help with this goal, they published a document entitled 'The Holocaust and Other Genocides', as well several other guidelines, which offers ideas and recommendations for educators.

IHRA worked on and adopted several non-legally binding working definitions that guide the Alliance in its work.

WORKING DEFINITION OF HOLOCAUST DENIAL AND DISTORTION

IHRA adopted its **Working Definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion** at its Plenary meeting in Toronto on 10 October 2013. The definition, which was developed by the IHRA's Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial, in coordination with the IHRA's governmental representatives, reads:

Holocaust denial is discourse and propaganda that deny the historical reality and the extent of the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis and their accomplices during World War II, known as the Holocaust or the Shoah. Holocaust denial refers specifically to any attempt to claim that the Holocaust/Shoah did not take place.

Holocaust denial may include publicly denying or calling into doubt the use of principal mechanisms of destruction (such as gas chambers, mass shooting, starvation and torture) or the intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people.

Holocaust denial in its various forms is an expression of antisemitism. The attempt to deny the genocide of the Jews is an effort to exonerate National Socialism and antisemitism from guilt or responsibility in the genocide of the Jewish people. Forms of Holocaust denial also include blaming the Jews for either exaggerating or creating the Shoah for political or financial gain as if the Shoah itself was the result of a conspiracy plotted by the Jews. In this, the goal is to make the Jews culpable and antisemitism once again legitimate.

The goals of Holocaust denial often are the rehabilitation of an explicit antisemitism and the promotion of political ideologies and conditions suitable for the advent of the very type of event it denies.

Distortion of the Holocaust refers, inter alia, to:

1. Intentional efforts to excuse or minimize the impact of the Holocaust or its principal elements, including collaborators and allies of Nazi Germany;
2. Gross minimization of the number of the victims of the Holocaust in contradiction to reliable sources;
3. Attempts to blame the Jews for causing their own genocide;
4. Statements that cast the Holocaust as a positive historical event. Those statements are not Holocaust denial but are closely connected to it as a radical form of antisemitism. They may suggest that the Holocaust did not go far enough in accomplishing its goal of "the Final Solution of the Jewish Question";
5. Attempts to blur the responsibility for the establishment of concentration and death camps devised and operated by Nazi Germany by putting blame on other nations or ethnic groups.

WORKING DEFINITION OF ANTISEMITISM

On 26 May 2016, the IHRA Plenary adopted its **Working Definition of Antisemitism**, which declares:

“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

The definition of antisemitism was originally drafted with the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), which worked with several prominent Jewish organizations to draft a comprehensive definition of antisemitism. However, in 2009 EUMC was replaced by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), which decided that it would not provide a definition to any form of prejudice, including antisemitism.

Explaining the decision, then-IHRA Chair, Romanian Ambassador Mihnea Constantinescu, **stated**, “All IHRA Member Countries share the concern that incidents of antisemitism are steadily rising and agree that the IHRA’s Member Countries and indeed the IHRA’s experts need political tools with which to fight this scourge. The IHRA’s 31 member countries – 24 of which are EU member countries – are committed to the Stockholm Declaration and thereby to fighting the evil of antisemitism through coordinated international political action.”

The definition includes a list of eleven reference **examples** to aid the identification of antisemitism. Some critics of the definition have claimed that by including within its examples references to Israel, it unfairly labels detractors of Israeli policy as antisemites. Defenders of the definition argue that the wording leaves room for vigorous criticism of Israel’s government as it states that “criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic” and that it is a non-legally binding definition, intended to guide and educate without limiting debate or free speech. The examples referenced within the definition of antisemitism include:

- Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.
- Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective – such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.
- Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.
- Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g. gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).
- Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
- Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.

- Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.
- Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
- Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.
- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
- Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

The definition and examples of antisemitism have been gradually adopted by member countries and other entities across the world. Universities, municipalities, religious groups and even sports clubs are among the bodies that have formally adopted the definition thus far.

The countries that have formally endorsed or adopted IHRA Working definition of antisemitism include:



United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has also been a strong advocate for adopting a universal definition of antisemitism, saying, “Such a definition can serve as a basis for law enforcement, as well as preventive policies.”

IHRA AND ROMA GENOCIDE REMEMBRANCE

On 11 May 2014, IHRA **hosted** its first conference focusing exclusively on the Roma genocide with the intention of distributing information to a broader group of educators. The Conference brought together Roma genocide experts who shared their experiences, successes, and challenges in developing and implementing projects revolving around the Roma Genocide. In attendance were over 100 people, including 40 IHRA delegates, from over 22 countries.

On 8 October 2020, **Ambassador Küchler** announced that IHRA **adopted** a non-binding working definition of antigypsism/anti-Roma discrimination: The definition emphasizes the importance of remembering the genocide of the Roma and acknowledging that neglecting to provide education about this history has contributed to the discrimination that many Roma communities experience today and declared:

The definition **described** antigypsism/anti-Roma discrimination as, “a manifestation of individual expressions and acts as well as institutional policies and practices of marginalization, exclusion, physical violence, devaluation of Roma cultures and lifestyles, and hate speech directed at Roma as well as other individuals and groups perceived, stigmatized, or persecuted during the Nazi era, and still today, as ‘Gypsies.’ This leads to the treatment of Roma as an alleged alien group and associates them with a series of pejorative stereotypes and distorted images that represent a specific form of racism.”

Ambassador Küchler **explained**, “Our working definition will provide us with an important tool to address the rising tide of anti-Roma sentiment and safeguard the historical record of the crimes committed by Nazi Germany and its collaborators.”

In January 2020, ahead of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the IHRA member countries **adopted** 14 measures supporting the ultimate objective of the IHRA: to preserve the memory of the Holocaust and to work towards and contribute to a world without genocide. The 2020 IHRA Ministerial Declaration, was adopted 20 years after the Stockholm Declaration’s passage.

Ambassador Georges Santer, the IHRA Chair at the time, declared: “We are delighted that ministers from around the world have adopted the 2020 Declaration today so that current and future generations do not forget the tragic events of the past and the historical record of the Holocaust is safeguarded. Against the backdrop of rising antisemitism, today’s declaration is absolutely crucial. As the IHRA Honorary Chairman, Yehuda Bauer, always says antisemitism is not a threat only to Jews but is a destructive force for our societies in general. IHRA Member Countries are obliged to fight these dangerous developments, safeguard the historical record of the past and honour Holocaust victims and survivors today and IHRA will support all Member Countries to do so.”

In addition to its diplomatic work, the IHRA **awards** grants to projects that aim to safeguard the historical record of the Holocaust and the genocide of the Roma. The IHRA Grant Strategy, which has been running successfully since 2010, is **open** for projects in the field of education, research and remembrance all around the world.

As antisemitism and Holocaust denial continue to increase, global alliances like the IHRA are essential in the international fight against bigotry. Their clear definitions of what constitutes antisemitism and Holocaust denial or distortion are crucial to properly educating current and future generations. The IHRA also builds international cooperation and coordination to counter antisemitism and preserve the memory of the Holocaust, thus building better societies for us all.



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