

I have the pleasure to welcoming you, also on behalf of the Prime Minister, and to expressing my most sincere wish that you will carry ever further the banner on which the basic principles imbued in the Stockholm Declaration are inscribed. The path we inaugurated on 1998, and was later solemnly reaffirmed with that paramount document, marks a date that someone may consider already remote in time. Yet we look at it as a benchmark of a precise and important time reference because in the span of little more than five years, altogether a relatively short period, the Task Force could witness a constant growth in the number of its members and an encouraging rhythm of increase. The wider number of Countries that already are, or are about to become, members is there to show that the sensitivity of the Governments and of the civil organisations of the various Countries – whether Europeans or not – is progressively growing and expanding to ever wider circles.

However, if this is a reassuring note, it is at the same time also cause for some worry because we must unfortunately admit that such an accrued sensitiveness is probably also a consequence of a widespread resurfacing of manifestations of anti-Semitism – sometimes creeping and disguised and in several cases also violent - always tinted with a symbolism the extremist roots of which are even too evident. Racism and intolerance are very often two sides of the same face, a face that we strongly and stubbornly refuse for being alien to our way of thinking and conceiving the relationship between populations and between individuals.

This is the reason why – on assuming the chairmanship of the Task Force – we Italians have purposefully underlined the concept that the task by far the most important that we are all called to fulfil is striving so to let the youngsters –those who enjoy the privilege not given to many of us older people, to live in a world generally devoid of totalitarian doctrines – look at a better world where stupid and unfounded principles and empty stereotypes will no longer be repeated. The horror for the Shoah, an event that we all condemn yet one that unfortunately some of our relatives, brothers or friends lived as direct victims or relatives of victims, to all of whom goes our warm thoughts, must engage us to operating so as it will not be repeated.

True, in recent times and even these very days, we had to witness barbaric acts and grave violations of human rights. However, the specificity of the Shoah, as you are all well aware, lies in that it has been an event methodically and in a cold and scientifically way planned and carried out with the aim of eliminating millions of individuals for the simple fact of their being Jews, even though victims of the nazis were also individuals pertaining to other social groups or presenting other characteristics, all that so as if the fact of being believers of a specified religion or pertaining to another population were a valid justification for acts that cannot be accepted by the conscience of those who, like us, think it is a paramount duty to model our own behaviour on the basic principles of the United Nations Charter and on other fundamental documents such as those that for us Europeans are inscribed in the basic stones of the European Union. Thus, it is not by chance that in Italy in the fight against anti-Semitism and in celebrating the Day of the Memory the highest institutional authorities have always been counted in the first ranks – the President of the Republic, the Presidents of the Senate and of the Chamber of Deputies, the Prime Minister as well as the Mayors of the bigger and smaller Italian cities, not to mention the State Archives and other public and private institutions which all pursue strenuously within their competences the same objectives. Among them I like to single out in a special way the Union of the Jewish Italian Communities.

The trails to be followed in order to achieve the goal of educating our children to the concept of respect – beware, I say respect, not tolerance because tolerate means to let or allow, concepts totally different from respecting – the trails to be followed, I say, are mainly those that engage ourselves in making them understand, and be correctly aware of, the facts of the past so that these events might serve as a lesson and a warning that they will not be repeated in the future. Yet, if we wish to educate properly the youngsters it is necessary to instruct adequately their teachers. Such a task must be performed primarily in our own countries even though the need to try to deliver our message to an ever wider circle of Countries should not be forgotten.

Education is therefore a riches of a paramount relevance. Thus it is rightfully so that the Task Force should mention in its title, at the first place, the concept of education, followed by the reference of the relevance of memory and in parallel the academic research. Education, memory and research are in fact the parameters within which must – and this is what really happens – be placed our common action in conformity with the principles contained in the Declaration of Stockholm that we all undersigned.

In order to achieve these results, the Italian delegation – accepting gladly and with determination the honour and at the same time the challenge implied in the exercise of the chairmanship for the current year – has created a Scientific Committee for consulting purposes and has at the same time promoted several

initiatives in the schools of every order and grades – primaries and upper - while very numerous are the research thesis on matters related to the Holocaust elaborated by the students of the various Italian universities. All these are indicators to be counted in the active side of the sheet both as far as the interest of the Italian student population for these issues is concerned and for the impact they bring to bear on the more general aspect of education. It must also be stressed the fact that many schools have organized travels of their students to the memorial sites. Education means not only knowing the facts of the past – it means also coming in direct contact with the sites of history which thus becomes a tangible teacher of life. It is for this reason that – as an Italian – I am convinced that we are moving along on the right path. We have still a long way to go and we must move relentlessly because what matters is not only the knowledge and the conscience of the past – we must always bear in mind also the oncoming future. This is the goal that we look at with special attention and seriousness but also with the confidence we put in the high standard of our scholars. Therefore we welcome the suggestions that would emerge from your studies and experience. We also welcome the academic achievements that would emerge from the Seminar on Primo Levi beginning tomorrow. According to us it is in fact necessary that all of us member Countries give the example in bringing up to the attention of our public opinions the specific issues of the Task Force. We are therefore convinced that organizing scholarly events open to international specialists is a methodology apt to transmit the message contained in the Task Force to an ever wider layer of exponents of the cultural and political world.

A positive answer to this kind of action might be seen in the great number of request for financial support received during the recent months : under the Italian chairmanship the Task Force has already approved projects of cooperation – the so-called liaison projects – for an amount of some 400.000 dollars. It is also relevant that many Countries have expressed their wish to strengthen their already existing links with the Task Force and to become full members. The Italian chair and many other Countries have already been pro-active in establishing the contacts –including the diplomatic ones –needed for accelerating that process.

It is with these feelings and with the certainty that the future generations will be able to express at their best the sentiments of human civilisation – as it was the case for many people of the former ones - that I wish you all a good work in this our beautiful Italy : IT-AL-YA, as you know, has a sweet and well-wishing meaning in the Hebrew language.

Gianni Letta