

**YOM SHOAH**  
(Thessaloniki, April 25, 2004)

It is for me a big honour to be present to-day in the city of Thessaloniki – so dearly cherished by all those who like myself are quite aware of its glorious history and of the values of freedom which are imbedded in your beautiful city - it is an honour to be here, I say, to commemorate the Yom Shoah in my capacity of President of the Italian delegation and of Chair of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. And allow me to stress the coincidence with the celebration in my country on this very same date of the liberation of Italy in 1945, a happy and to me very meaningful coincidence. I believe that there is no need to stress what an important role the ITF has been and is performing in combating anti – Semitism by means of teaching, remembering and researching issues, facts and sites related to the Holocaust. Yet I think it is important to stress that the ITF member-countries share the belief that only a very good knowledge and deep-seeded conscience of the roots on which anti- Semitism is thriving can be the necessary rampart against the repetition of the horrible sequel of events that brought about what we now call the Shoah. An event so dramatic and of such big proportions that many people could not believe to having taken place while others, though not in good faith, prefer to deny the reality of it. The truth is that the Shoah has tragically blotched our continent and stands as a black mark for the entire mankind. True, other massacres have existed in the past and – I hate to admit it – unfortunately are being perpetrated even in our days. Yet, and unlike any other, the Shoah stands out in its uniqueness because it was a deliberate and scientifically planned and coldly carried- out project for a mass-destruction of an individual group of persons, people that can be identified only by religion, as not many other common features do in fact exist to single out the Jewish citizens of the various countries involved.

You know very well that the roots of that monstrous project are to be found in the nazis' ideology of a pretended superiority of one people over any other one – the so-called arian race, a scientifically wrong and unfounded concept. In fact that concept is nothing but the result of intolerance against anyone who is different and that stems from ignorance and stupid prejudices.

I think it is appropriate to say here to-day that alongside with the memorial commemoration of those who were victims of the Shoah one should also mention the courage of several other people who – very often anonymously – tried to alleviate the fate of their neighbours of Jewish religion and even risked their own safety in doing so, people who are now - and quite justly I believe - remembered in Yad Vashem and among which I am proud to say some Italians are numbered, while others remain in the memory of those who witnessed their behaviour.

To-day's ceremony - which matches other Days of the Memory, celebrated in Italy as well as in other various countries of Europe and elsewhere - is a very important feature and one more brick layed in the strong wall that we must erect to combat anti- Semitism as well as any other form of racism, sexism and intolerance. Yet, raising such a wall is not an easy task and it demands the effort of all the peoples of good-will. Such an effort should be deployed in multiple directions both at the local and governmental levels because mistrust, prejudices and hatred are the roots and the fodder of many evils of the world. It is therefore encouraging to see that the present number of 16 member-countries is about to be increased by the accession of other important European States and that the ITF has been constantly expanding throughout the six years of its existence, from that distant and at the same time close 1998 when it was founded. It is encouraging, I say, because such a trend is a clear evidence of the increased sensitiveness of the governments for the problems involved by the persisting presence in layers of their countries of anti – Semitism, and therefore for the need to wage a serious fight against it.

The ITF, on its part, is deploying very steady efforts in order to reach what we believe is the most important goal: the eradication from the minds of the younger generations of those dangerous roots. The path along which we move is basically that of encouraging individual, academic and governmental authorities to do their utmost to educate the youth. In a few words, I would say that we in ITF are specially concerned with educating the teachers so as to prepare them to teach their children in the appropriate way and also by means of showing them the consequences of the errors that in the past were committed both at the individual and social levels.

Should I summarize my line of thoughts I would say that we must all of us earnestly deploy our own energies so as to “remember the past while shaping the future. ” Thank you.

*Giorgio Franchetti Pardo*