

## **Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Dendias' welcoming address at the IHRA Athens Plenary 2021**

It is my privilege to welcome today to Athens, the participants to the first Plenary of the Holocaust International Remembrance Alliance under the 2021- 2022 Greek Presidency.

Dear Friends,

We do not want to see the memory of the Holocaust as an echo of the past;

We see it as a living reality and a force for the preservation and advancement of our freedom and our way of life.

This is actually the thread running throughout our Presidency;

We focus on teaching the Holocaust to the younger generations and combating denial and distortion in all their forms;

Principally on the Internet and the Social Media, where, sadly, these poisonous ideas tend lately to re-emerge.

We strongly believe that the memory of the Holocaust can be a shield of 21<sup>st</sup> century democracy.

Populism now ranks among the prime challenges of our time;

And what was National Socialism but populism with a gun and a thirst for blood?

The impossibility, or the unwillingness, to discern between truth and obsession;

The unquestioning acceptance of far out ideas and explanations;

The readiness to go to extremes;

They are still with us.

Of course, they now pose as wolves in sheep's clothing.

And this is the reason why the remembrance of the Holocaust matters, perhaps more today than at any other moment since the end of the Second World War.

You, Ladies and Gentlemen and distinguished representatives of IHRA, are the researchers and the interpreters of the History that was handed down to us from those days.

The guardians of the Memory, the survivors of the death camps and the soldiers who fought to liberate them are sadly fading away.

This makes your role even more important, as you are the ones who will pass it on to the next generations.

The Memory of the Holocaust, far from an echo of the past, will have its own exalted place in the ideological arsenal of Freedom and Democracy of the future;

This, as long as there will be men and women who will choose to defend these values.

IHRA is waging this combat.

We need to build our defenses against the creeping return of extremist ideas and to defeat them on the terrain.

IHRA must be given all the backing necessary to carry out its work, moral and political, by all means.

I understand this will be discussed in the following days at the appropriate Committees;

We encourage all to view the matter with an open mind and a positive disposition.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished representatives of IHRA,

You are today in the city where Democracy was born and where Freedom first acquired the meaning we give her today.

This is also the land that welcomed the first Jewish communities in Europe, in the time of Alexander the Great, twenty-three centuries ago.

The descendants of these communities, the Romaniotes, are still with us, alongside the later Sephardic communities of northern Greece;

They enrich Greece with their cultural, artistic and intellectual heritage.-