

From the Chairman of the Directorate



Dear Friends,

As the world grapples with the Holocaust over sixty years since its conclusion, an unusual paradox is increasingly evident. While mankind is moving away in time from the terrible events of that period, its interest in the Shoah grows steadily. Far from being relegated to the dusty shelves of history, more and more people around the world, from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, are delving deeper into the subject. Why is this? What is it about the Holocaust that so agitates humanity, so many decades after it occurred?

The answer is clear – the core existential questions that the Shoah raises remain unresolved: how could this unprecedented atrocity have been sanctioned – and implemented – by a modern nation-state? What made the perpetrators of the worst crimes against humanity act so unhesitatingly against their defenseless victims? Why did the millions and millions of bystanders not utter a word of opposition? What terrible “choiceless choices” did Jews encounter, and how did they grapple with the unspeakable day-to-day hardships they faced while still maintaining their Jewish solidarity and human dignity? And how were the relatively few Righteous Among the Nations able to act so defiantly to save Jewish lives?

In recent years, Yad Vashem has been concentrating its efforts on addressing these and other related questions, with the year 2008 yielding substantial achievements in the fields of education, remembrance, documentation and research.

With our recently completed development plan prioritizing education, there has been a significant expansion of educational activities by our International School for Holocaust Studies, in Israel and abroad. This has facilitated the creation of networks of dedicated teachers, who contribute their own unique experience to the dialogue, and gain from us the professional tools and support system necessary to strengthen learning about the Holocaust in their native countries. Yad Vashem is now the leading source of Holocaust education in the world, enhancing our unique role in preserving Jewish continuity, joining the global struggle against antisemitism and racism in all its forms, and promoting tolerance and the acceptance of humankind's inherent heterogeneity.

The facade presented by antisemitism is presently undergoing a deceptive and dangerous mutation. No longer exclusively characterized by religiously based hatred, the “new” antisemitism sinisterly masquerades as delegitimizing criticism of Israel and its policies, both regarding the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and relating to its perceived status as a Western outpost in the Middle East. Holocaust denial and distortion are cynically utilized by the new antisemites, and Holocaust-related imagery and terminology are abused with increasing audacity.

The thousands of graduates of our educational seminars, and their tens of thousands of students, form a lasting and determined buffer against the growth of antisemitism worldwide. With this in mind, Yad Vashem has adapted to the “Google generation,” rapidly expanding our Internet capabilities, and making our vast and varied databases accessible to the global public. Historical accounts, pedagogic materials, original exhibitions and survivor testimonies can now be viewed online and via publications and traveling exhibitions in a range of languages, reaching audiences in hitherto untouched locations continent-wide, and making a lasting impression on key public opinion-shapers and decision-makers.

These achievements have been met, of course, thanks to the tireless efforts of our dedicated staff, and the vital and continuing support of our friends and supporters worldwide. Thus we realize our shared goals and fulfill our mission: the transformation of the Mount of Remembrance in Jerusalem into a spiritual center for the Jewish people and a source of inspiration for the nations of the world. In a time of renewed economic and political challenge, we are indebted to you for your steadfast assistance. During 2009, we shall press on with a profound sense of urgency. There is not a moment to lose.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Avner Shalev". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small flourish at the end.

Avner Shalev
Chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate