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Telling the Story, Teaching the Core

The Eighth
International
Conference
on Holocaust
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Telling the

Leah Goldstein

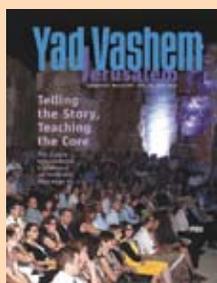
■ *“Inevitably, the Holocaust has become history. But that does not mean that its chain of transmission should be broken... Survivors, together with several generations of Jews and non-Jews, have bequeathed to us a wealth of information and analysis upon which we can rely. We have Holocaust-related libraries, archives, testimonies, museums, books, conferences, scholars, teachers, writers and artists. Yad Vashem is a global leader in this mission. And Holocaust educators have a special responsibility: to be faithful to the truth of the subject – to get it right.”*

Prof. Michael R. Marrus, University of Toronto,
Keynote Speaker at the International Conference

On 18-21 June, 355 educators from 54 countries worldwide gathered at Yad Vashem for the Eighth International Conference on Holocaust Education. Over half of the participants at the biannual conference were graduates of educational seminars at the International School for Holocaust Studies.

“The goal of the conference was different from any other preceding it,” explained Director of the International School Dorit Novak. “The Holocaust is being instrumentalized more than ever to address a range of issues not necessarily directly related to it, which opens the door to diminishing, equating and manipulating its history and memory. We therefore felt an urgent need to ‘get back to the basics,’ to teach the fundamental aspects of the event, in order to equip educators with the knowledge and tools necessary to deal with these current trends.”

“Yad Vashem is challenged by the fact that people today use the word Holocaust in many different ways,” said Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev. “We must go back to the core issues of the *Shoah*: what actually happened in the ghettos, the camps, and during the ‘Final Solution,’ how the Nazi party instituted an atmosphere of hatred and dehumanization, and what were the Jewish – and non-Jewish – responses to it all. Only then can we use this knowledge to promote the protection of human rights, the prevention of genocide and the fight against intolerance – all of which are important and relevant topics in today’s world.”



■ On the cover:
*Opening Ceremony
of the Eighth
International
Conference on
Holocaust Education,
Valley of the
Communities,
June 2012*

Story, Teaching the Core

The Eighth International Conference on Holocaust Education



■ Participants at one of the 81 professional workshops held during the three-day conference

The conference was divided into three days, each one focusing on specific objectives. Minister of Education Gideon Sa'ar opened the conference, and Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev presented a lecture on "Educational Challenges in the 21st Century." The first day was then dedicated to learning, with some 25 experts from Yad Vashem's International Institute for Holocaust Research as well as prominent Israeli academics presenting the main topics in Holocaust education, including the history of antisemitism, Nazi racial ideology, armed resistance, rescue attempts, the death camps and postwar trials, as well as the roles of faith, literature and art in the Holocaust.

Day Two concentrated on teaching, with 81 workshops (nine in Spanish) focusing on how to make the core issues relevant in the classroom. "The participants received the latest

"We must go back to the core issues of the Shoah: what actually happened and what were the Jewish – and non-Jewish – responses to it all. Only then can we use this knowledge to promote the protection of human rights, the prevention of genocide and the fight against intolerance"

Avner Shalev

and most effective pedagogical tools in the field in order to make the Holocaust a relevant and significant issue in their teaching," explained conference director Ephraim Kaye, Director of International Seminars for Educators at the International School for Holocaust Studies. "In addition, eighty percent of the presenters were Yad Vashem graduates, who illustrated to their peers the most successful examples of what actually works in the classroom."

The final day was directed towards "special interest groups": Holocaust and Jewish museum directors; Jewish educators in formal and informal Jewish education; and teachers of Holocaust curricula on the college level. One of the panel speakers was the Rev. James LaMacchia, Associate Chaplain and Religious Studies teacher at Saint Mark's School in Maryland (USA). "Many US secondary schools

Eighty percent of the presenters were Yad Vashem graduates, who illustrated to their peers the most successful examples of what actually works in the classroom

only offer a unit on the *Shoah* scattered among such courses as American History or World Literature,” explained LaMacchia. “Because it is easy to trivialize and diminish the Holocaust in a ‘culture of victimization,’ educators are challenged to present the *Shoah* in all of its complexity, so that students understand its absolutely unique character and continuing resonance in world history and politics. Despite an ever-expanding curriculum, we educators must take the time to present the social, political, economic and cultural factors and events that led to the *Shoah*.”

LaMacchia also stressed the success of utilizing survivor testimony in Holocaust education, explaining that it “allows the students to connect the history to real people whose lives were directly affected by the events.” In fact, the final session of the conference was devoted to this very issue, with nine Holocaust survivors offering participants the chance to hear their personal stories and ask pertinent questions about their firsthand experiences



■ Education Minister Gideon Sa'ar and Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev (center) with conference delegates from around the world

during the war. Internationally renowned author and Holocaust survivor Dr. Samuel Pisar gave the final keynote speech, which included sections of Leonard Bernstein's Symphony No. 3, “Kaddish” combined with Pisar's composition, “A Dialogue with God.”

The lecture was in memory of Benefactors of the International School and the conference Izzy and Babs (Ruth) Asper, z”l.

The International Conference was generously supported by the Asper Foundation, the Adelson Family Foundation and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

Asper Foundation Renews Support for Holocaust Education

■ The Asper Foundation of Canada recently announced the renewal of its support of Yad Vashem's educational efforts for an additional five years. This welcome decision means that the Winnipeg-based family foundation will continue to fund various initiatives carried out by the International School for Holocaust Studies under the framework of the Asper International Program in Holocaust Studies.

The Asper Program, established a decade ago, focuses upon training educators in English-speaking countries and implementing educational outreach. These initiatives include the funding of seminars at the International School and its biannual International Educators Conference, as well as sending Yad Vashem staff to conduct in-depth training abroad. Over the past decade, thousands of teachers, educators and pupils in the English-speaking world have benefited from this programming. Additionally, the Asper Program provides vital support for Yad Vashem's work within



■ Leonard Asper, Vice-Chair of The Asper Foundation and CEO of Anthem Media Group Inc., at the International Conference closing ceremony, dedicated to his parents, Babs (Ruth) and Izzy Asper, z”l

the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF).

The Asper Foundation is chaired by David Asper. His brother, Leonard Asper, is Vice-Chair, and their sister Gail Asper is the Foundation's president. The Asper family remains active in many fields in their native Canada and in Israel, promoting the values instilled in them by their parents Izzy and Babs (Ruth) Asper z”l, who established the Foundation.

Projects focusing upon Holocaust education remain a core feature of Asper programming, and the Foundation is also spearheading the Canadian Museum of Human Rights, due to open in 2013 with a Holocaust gallery at its center.

“We are delighted to be continuing our partnership with Yad Vashem,” said Moses (Moe) Levy, Executive Director of the Asper Foundation. “This is a project of which the entire Asper Foundation is very proud, and we look forward to it going from strength to strength.”