

November 11, 2004

Bucharest –The International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, today presented its final report to Romanian President Ion Iliescu in a special ceremony at the presidential palace.

The 400-page report details the history of the Holocaust in Romania as well as the commission's conclusions and recommendations on how the government can foster Holocaust awareness, remembrance, research and education in Romania.

Among its key findings:

- The Holocaust in Romania had deep Romanian roots in a century-long history of widespread anti-Semitism in the country's political and cultural elites.
- Directives to degrade and destroy Jews and Jewish institutions came from the highest authorities in Bucharest.
- Between 280,000 and 380,000 Romanian and Ukrainian Jews were murdered or died at the hand of Romanian civilian and military authorities and in territories under their control.
- Approximately 340,000 Romanian Jews survived because the government terminated deportations in 1943, 16 months before Romania ended its alliance with Nazi Germany and entered the war against the Axis.
- Over 25,000 Romanian Roma were also deported during the Holocaust, and over 11,000 perished, resulting in the disappearance of some centuries-old Roma communities.
- Irrefutable and abundant documentary evidence shows Ion Antonescu's personal responsibility for the deportation and the physical destruction of the Jews and Roma under Romanian jurisdiction.
- Approximately 135,000 Romanian Jews living in Hungary-controlled Transylvania and 5,000 Romanian Jews living outside Romania also perished in the Holocaust.

In addition, the Commission has provided a set of recommendations to the Romanian Government. These include:

- The annulment of war criminal rehabilitations, of which there have been a number of cases over the last 15 years
- The establishment of a national Holocaust Remembrance Day, which has since been implemented (Its inaugural observance took place on Oct. 12, 2004.)
- The construction of a national Holocaust memorial and museum in Bucharest
- The documentation of the names of every Romanian Holocaust victim
- The creation of a special working group to review, correct, revise, and draft appropriate Holocaust-related school curricula and textbooks

- The establishment of Holocaust education curricula and Holocaust courses in secondary schools and universities, and for professional groups and associations
- The establishment of a central archive and foundation dedicated to Holocaust education and research in Romania

President Iliescu established the commission in November 2003 and named Nobel Peace Prize winner, Elie Wiesel, as its chairman. Organized with the assistance of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yad Vashem, the American Jewish Committee and B'nai B'rith International, it is comprised of Holocaust scholars, social scientists, historians and public figures; leaders of international Jewish and Romany organizations; representatives of the Romanian-Jewish community, and representatives of the Romanian Presidency. Commission members came from Romania, Israel, the United States, France and Germany.

In presenting the report to President Iliescu, the Commission's chairman, Elie Wiesel, expressed his hope that it would have a broad and lasting impact on the Romanian society:

“The various pogroms in Bucharest and Iasi as well as the torments inflicted on the Jews in Bucovina, Bessarabia and Transnistria must and will not be forgotten. Nor will your impressive efforts to atone for those atrocities with the overall desire to strengthen democracy and freedom in this land which has had its share of oppression and suffering”.

In response, President Iliescu reiterated his remarks delivered at the first Holocaust Commemoration Day in Romania on October 12:

“The terrible tragedy of the Holocaust was made possible by the complicity of leaders of some institutions of state – the secret services, the army, the forces of public order, etc. – as well as by the quasi-inexistence of civil society. The brutality of the dictatorial regime made possible the suppression of all forms of protest, and a regime of legal repression against the Jewish community was intended to impose passivity at the macro-social level regarding all of the varied aspects of the Holocaust.”

The work of the Commission was facilitated by three vice-chairmen: Tuviahu Friling of Israel, Radu Ioanid of the United States and Mihail Ionescu of Romania. Joining those participating in the meetings in Bucharest were Sarah Bloomfield, Director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and Irena Steinfeldt, representing Avner Shalev, Chairman of the Directorate, Yad Vashem.