

## Yehuda Bauer's Contribution to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)\*

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Professor Bauer was a gifted teacher, yet I believe that I learned more from him outside the classroom. He always instructed us to interweave primary sources when researching history. However, in the conference room he taught me how to solve disagreements over coffee with one's interlocutors, as well as how to deftly express nuance in the English language.

For more than three decades, I had the privilege to study under Professor Yehuda Bauer in various professional capacities: as my professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; editor-in-chief of *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*; director of Yad Vashem's International Holocaust Research Institute; independent advisor for the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF); Honorary Chairman of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA); and as a world-renowned speaker who gave talks—usually without notes—in classrooms, parliaments, online, and in various forums.

In May 1998, Professor Yehuda Bauer began his formal association with the Swedish government as an advisor to the ITF. However, Bauer's connection with high-ranking Swedish representatives had already begun several months earlier. Since I may be the only person who attended that first May 1998 ITF meeting who is still actively involved with IHRA, I shall try to shed some light on how our Israeli professor became connected to this international forum.

On August 22, 1997, Swedish Minister Thage Peterson's office convened a meeting to discuss various ideas "in the wake of the disturbing findings of the poll of Swedish youngsters." (See Fig. 1.) Bauer attended this meeting together with Israeli Ambassador to Sweden Gideon Ben

\* Formerly known as the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research, or the ITF.

Ami and Mr. Henrik Bachner, a member of the Jewish community. After he returned to Israel, he updated Yad Vashem's Chairman at the time, Avner Shalev about this discussion. Bauer appears to have clearly understood that the Swedish government was planning a serious initiative to promote Holocaust awareness on a national level.

Bauer, together with Shalev, issued a follow-up letter to Peterson on September 1, 1997, outlining several avenues of possible cooperation between Yad Vashem and Swedish institutions, "through the good offices of the Israeli embassy, and with the involvement of the Jewish community." (See Fig. 1.)

On November 25, 1997, Shalev wrote another letter to Minister Thage Peterson outlining proposed educational programming for Swedish educators (see Fig. 2). An additional two-page written proposal was included with the letter, which suggested the use of teaching kits and multimedia tools. Bauer, who was copied on Shalev's letter, undoubtedly encouraged the development of this written proposal.

On December 9, 1997, Sweden's "Living History Project" plan was outlined by Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson. In a letter from Swedish Ambassador John HM Hagard, Hagard wrote that their goal was to stimulate "discussion on such values as compassion, democracy and the equal value of all people, using the Holocaust as a point of departure." (See Fig. 3.) This national initiative sought to organize Holocaust memorial ceremonies on January 27; provide parents and the general public with a book about the Holocaust; support educators with trainings and tools; buttress research and instruction on the Holocaust and genocide on the university level; support Holocaust survivor groups; erect a Holocaust memorial in the Swedish capital; encourage study tours to the Auschwitz Birkenau State Museum in Poland; and more. In this memorandum the Swedish government stated that it would allocate 15 million Swedish krona for these Holocaust initiatives aimed to foster Holocaust education, remembrance, and research.

A short time thereafter, in early December, Professor Bauer attended the London Conference on Nazi Gold. During this international gathering of representatives from some forty countries, he met the director-general for Political Affairs of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ulf Hjertonsson. On the sidelines of this conference, Hjertonsson apparently briefed Bauer about components of the Living History Project plan.

Following this discussion Bauer wrote Hjertonsson another letter, dated January 7, 1998. In Bauer's words Hjertonsson "kindly encouraged"

the Israeli professor to contact him concerning “the programs of teaching about the Holocaust, genocide, and problems affecting education about democracy in general.” In this missive Bauer noted that he was aware of the “varieties of programs” initiated by Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson and that he was “very appreciative of this effort.” In his typical savvy diplomatic manner, Bauer underscored that “we have no wish to try and teach our Swedish friends what to do and how to do it”; politely suggesting, once again, some areas where Yad Vashem “could be of some help.” Bauer also referred to his earlier exchange with Minister Thage Peterson, mentioning that he was “aware of the Riksdag meeting on January 7, 1998,” in Stockholm and extended Yad Vashem’s sincere interest to cooperate (see Fig. 4).

On March 11, 1998, Hjertonsen visited Yad Vashem, and further discussions about possible cooperation took place in Jerusalem. On April 1, Hjertonsen invited Bauer to attend an event in Stockholm scheduled on Thursday, May 7, titled “Tell Ye Your Children.” On April 20, Bauer replied that he would “be delighted to prepare a short presentation of what Yad Vashem is doing in the sphere of education,” as well as how he sees “the issues at hand.” Bauer very much supported “the idea of international cooperation on all issues of education, research, and publication,” stating that “the addition of Sweden and its participation in these efforts will be most welcome.” (See Fig. 5.)

At the end of Bauer’s letter, he emphasized that he “personally, and Yad Vashem as an institution, will be happy to cooperate.” He also mentioned that a request had been made to the Swedish Prime Minister’s office to permit an “educational expert” to accompany him to Stockholm at Yad Vashem’s expense. That “educational expert” was me (see Fig. 5).

During the morning of May 7, Professor Bauer and I sat next to each other at the Tell Ye Your Children conference. At the time I was a junior staff member tasked to take copious notes and formulate a detailed trip report for Yad Vashem’s administration. During the proceedings I passed a short note in Hebrew to Professor Bauer, asking him, “What do the Swedes want to do? Build a Holocaust museum?” he contended that “he had no idea.”

On May 7, 1998, the ITF—now known as IHRA—was established in Stockholm. During the event, which included speakers representing the governments of the United Kingdom and the United States, Persson announced the Swedish government’s keen interest for “increased international cooperation.” After the morning session internal talks among

representatives of the three governments were led by Ulf Hjertonsen, with a view to “formulate a plan for continued joint activities.” During this closed afternoon meeting, Professor Yehuda Bauer was officially asked by the Swedish government representatives to be a close advisor to the ITF (see Fig. 6).

Clearly no one who attended the May 7, 1998, meeting in Stockholm could have predicted what would follow, and how the ITF would gradually expand and develop over the next couple of decades.

On September 25, 1998, representatives to the ITF convened for the second time in person in Washington, D.C., including delegates from two new member countries: Germany and Israel. By this time it became clear that Professor Yehuda Bauer had assumed the role of an independent advisor to the ITF, even though he was still affiliated with the International Institute for Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem. Over the next few months, additional European countries would join these efforts.

When examining documents about the genesis of the ITF/IHRA, it becomes clear how much Professor Bauer impressed Swedish officials—both professionally and personally. The rapport that he initially established in Stockholm, and beyond, ultimately propelled him to become the Honorary Chairman of an international body of thirty-five member countries.

In addition, these documents shed light on Professor Bauer’s initial perception that Yad Vashem’s educational expertise could assist the Swedish authorities. More than a year following his first meeting with Thage Peterson, it appears, however, that the Swedish government preferred to develop a multilateral structure to foster Holocaust education rather than a bilateral cooperation agreement.

Professor Bauer was strongly committed to the mission of the ITF/IHRA until his death at the age of ninety-eight. Despite his failing health, his dedication never waned, and his resolve to promote Holocaust Studies on the global level became ever more emboldened.

May his memory continue to inspire us at Yad Vashem, in IHRA, and beyond.

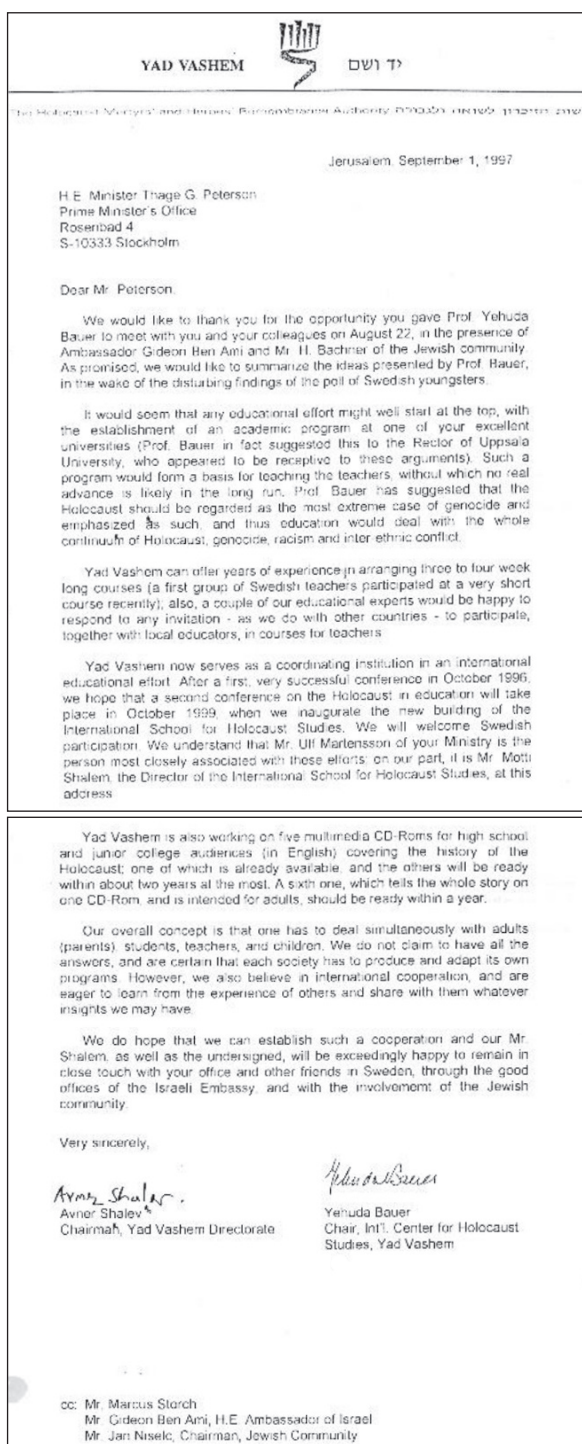


Fig. 1: Letter from both Chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate Avner Shalem and Professor Yehuda Bauer to Swedish Minister Thage Peterson, at the Swedish Prime Minister's Office, dated September 1, 1997. Document in possession of the author and in the Yad Vashem administrative archive.

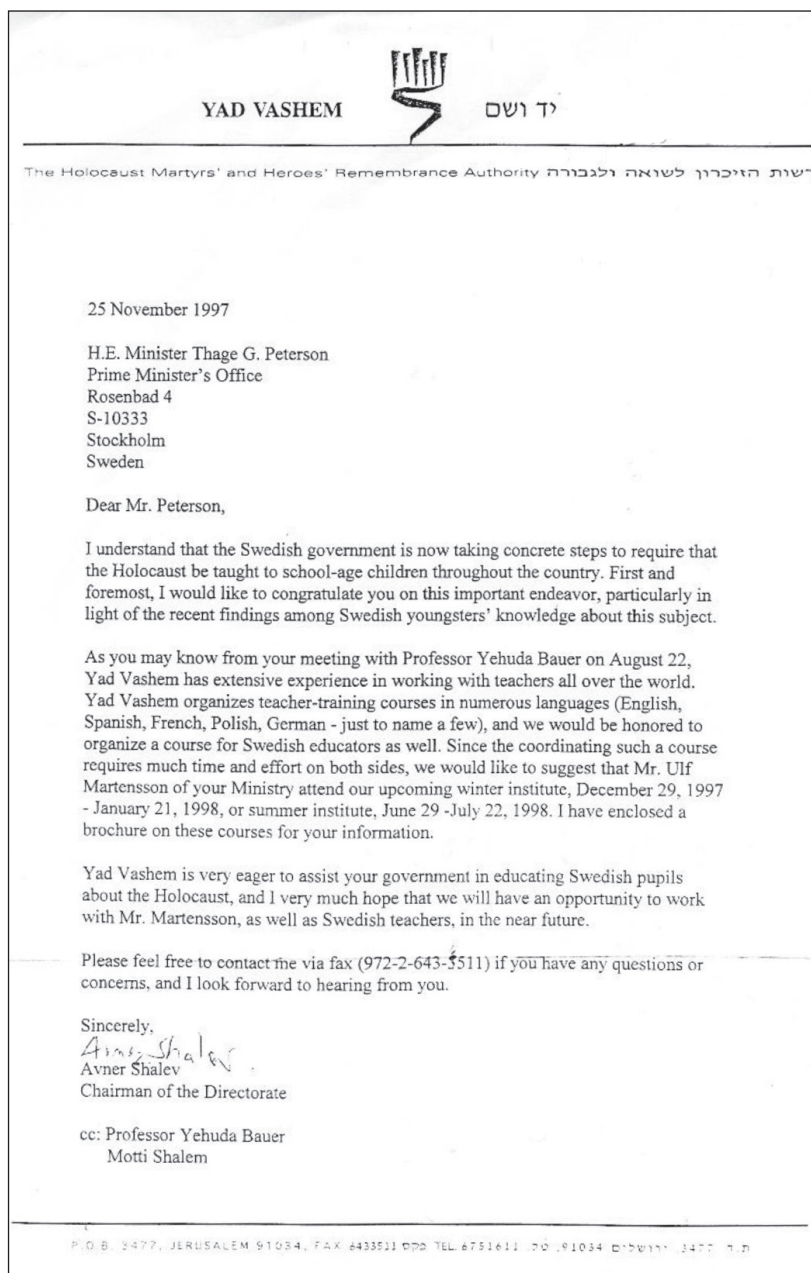


Fig. 2: Letter from the Chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate Avner Shalev to Swedish Minister Thage Peterson, dated November 25, 1997.

Document in possession of the author and in the  
Yad Vashem administrative archive.

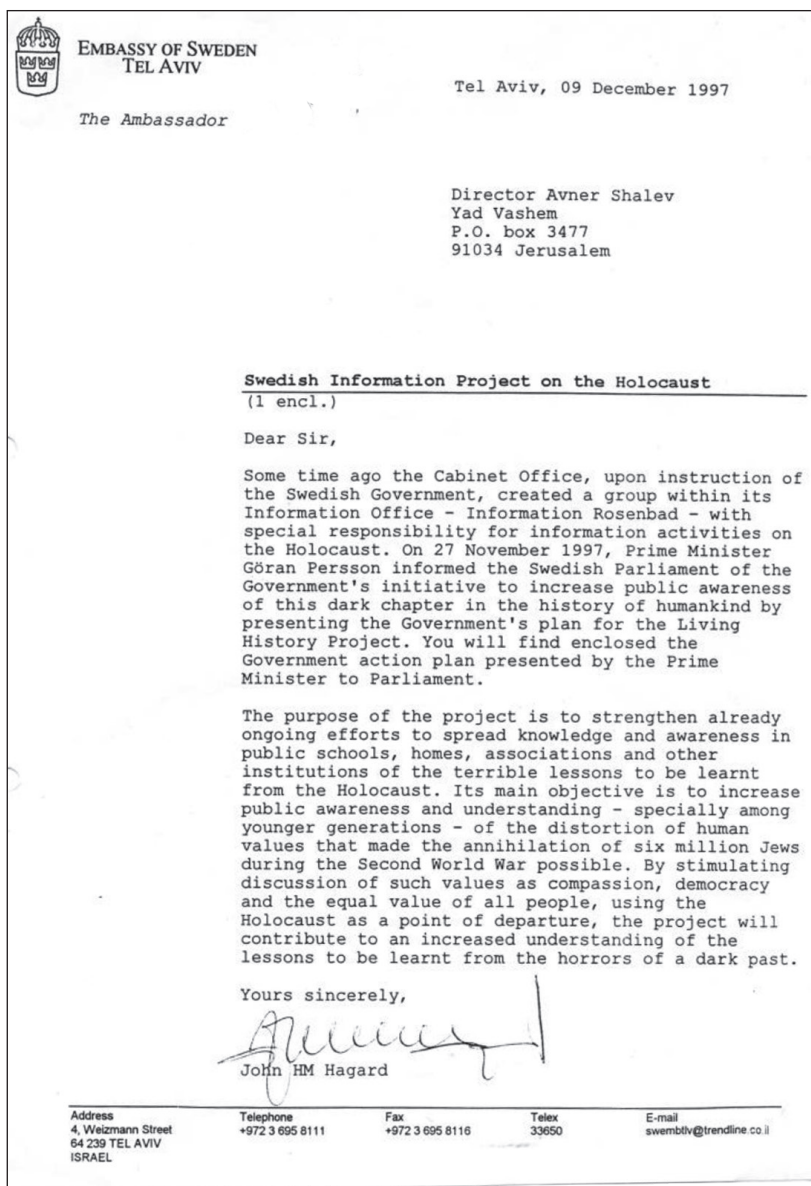
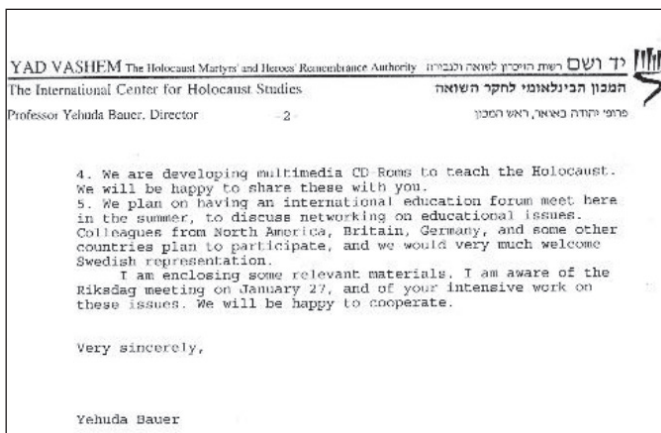


Fig. 3: Letter from the Embassy of Sweden in Tel Aviv, John HM Hagard, to Yad Vashem's director Avner Shalev, dated December 9, 1997. Document in possession of the author and in the Yad Vashem administrative archive.



Fig. 4: Letter from Professor Yehuda Bauer to Swedish Director-General for Political Affairs Ulf Hjertonnsson, dated January 7, 1998. Document in possession of the author and in the Yad Vashem administrative archive.



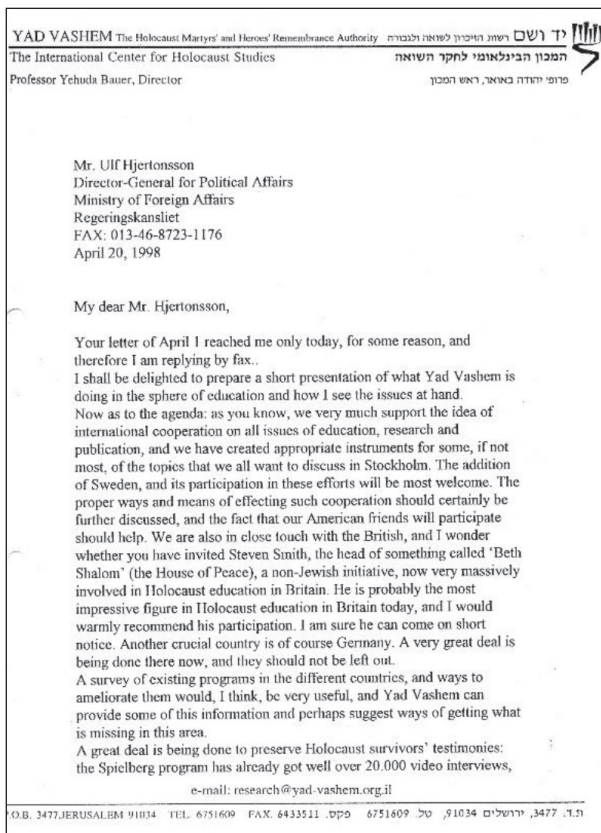
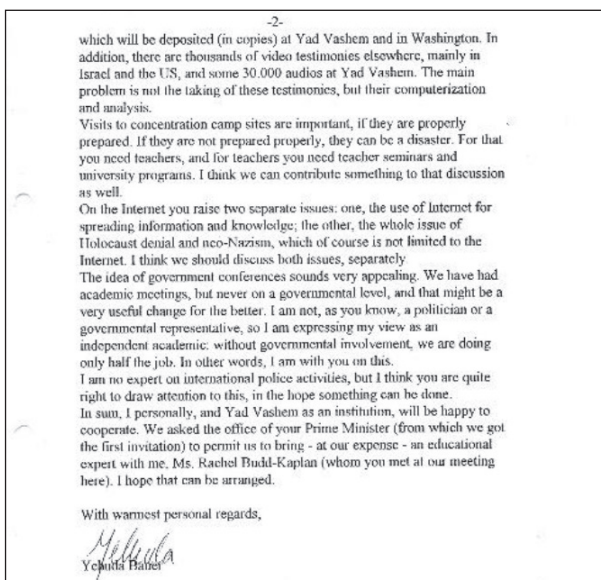



Fig. 5: Letter from Professor Yehuda Bauer to Swedish Director-General for Political Affairs Ulf Hjertsonsson, dated April 20, 1998. Document in possession of the author and in the Yad Vashem administrative archive.



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Prime Minister's Office

## Press Release

28 April 1998

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### The Stockholm Meeting on the Holocaust – "...Tell ye your Children"

On Thursday, 7 May, the Swedish Government is to host an international meeting to discuss how countries could cooperate to disseminate information about the Holocaust. The background to the meeting is the Swedish Living History project, the book entitled "... Tell ye your Children" and a proposal for increased international cooperation that Prime Minister Göran Persson made in letters to President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Tony Blair in January this year.

The meeting will open on the morning of 7 May with a seminar with speakers representing the governments of the USA and the UK. Guests from the USA include Mr Bennett Freeman, Senior Adviser to the Under Secretary for Economic and Business Affairs, Mr Stuart Ebenstal, who heads the international investigations into Jewish assets, Dr William Slavy, Chief Historian at the US Department of State, and Mr Ralph Grosswald, Director of External Affairs at the USA Holocaust Museum in Washington.

Guests from the UK include Mr Anthony Layden, Head of the Western European Department, FCO, Ms Gill Bennett, Chief Historian at the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Dr David Cesarani, Director of Studies and Educational Activities at the Wiener Library in London, and Lord Janner, Chairman of the Holocaust Educational Trust in London. Professor Yehuda Bauer from the Yad Vashem Institute and Mr Ephraim Zuroff, Director at Simon Wiesenthal Centre in Israel will also participate.

The seminar will be opened by the Prime Minister, Göran Persson, and will close with a discussion led by the Minister for Immigrant Integration, Lars Engqvist. The seminar is open to representatives of the media.

In the afternoon, the Stockholm Meeting will continue with internal talks between the government delegations led by Ulf Hjertqvist, Director-General for Political Affairs at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The purpose of these talks is to formulate a plan for continued joint activities.

The meeting will close with a press conference at 16.00 in the Rosenbad Conference Centre (*Rosenbads konferenscentrum*), where the meeting also will take place, entrance from Drottninggatan 1. A more detailed programme for the meeting will be sent out later. Press credentials will be required for those attending the seminar and the press conference.

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Fig. 6: Press Release from the Swedish Prime Minister's Office, dated April 28, 1998. Document in possession of the author and in the Yad Vashem administrative archive.