

The Jagiellonian University's UNESCO Chair for Holocaust Education

In 1992, on the basis of decision no. 26 of the session of the UNESCO General Conference University Twinning and Networking the UNITWIN/UNESCO CHAIRS programme was established. The aim of the programme is the exchange of knowledge and academic research as well as the creation of a network of cooperation amongst institutions of tertiary education through the establishment of chairs devoted to priority areas for the UNESCO organisation. In 2012 there were 763 UNESCO chairs in 134 countries, of which there are 12 functioning in Poland. There had previously existed only one UNESCO Chair for Translation Studies and Intercultural Communication at the Jagiellonian University, but in 2013, on the application of the Centre for Holocaust Studies (CHS), the Jagiellonian University was granted the right to create the UNESCO Chair for Education on the Holocaust.

The decision to create a chair for education on the Holocaust is the result of the endeavours of the Jagiellonian University and in particular the CHS. From the beginning of its existence, the Jagiellonian University has been an institution which not only has offered a high quality of education but which has also paid attention to the shaping of tolerance in its students, openness to others and a respect for human rights. The long and fruitful cooperation between the University, the Centre and the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, which is situated on the remains of the former Nazi concentration camp, and which since 1979 has been on the UNESCO World Heritage List is well known. Of immense importance in the creation of the Chair has been the contributions of: Prof. Zdzisław Mach, Prof. Jonathan Webber and Dr Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs.

One of the first initiatives at the Jagiellonian University to be connected with the subject of the Holocaust was the Tempus project *Civil Society and Social Change in Europe after Auschwitz*, which took place from 1992–1995 and involved the Jagiellonian University's Institute of European Studies and

the University of Oldenburg. This project was coordinated by Prof. Jonathan Webber, a British social anthropologist and world class specialist on the Holocaust. For many years Professor Webber lectured at universities in Oxford and Birmingham. He is a founding member of the International Oświęcim Council, while in 2004, together with the British photographer Chris Schwarz, he founded the Galicia Jewish Museum in Cracow, in which are presented the results of their joint work: photographs and descriptions documenting the Jewish heritage in Galicia. Professor Webber was also the head of the UNESCO Chair for International Relations Research at the University of Birmingham. At present he lectures at the Institute of European Studies at the Jagiellonian University and is one of the most important experts at the university's Centre for Holocaust Studies, as well as standing at the head of the European Association for Holocaust Studies, founded in 2012, whose aim is to coordinate the efforts of university lecturers and museum employees in the process of researching and teaching about the Holocaust.

In 1996 at the then Department of European Studies (now the Institute of European Studies) the Holocaust Studies Unit was created, which in time, thanks to the endeavours of Prof. Wiesław Kozub-Ciembroniewicz – an eminent specialist on political and legal doctrines, for many years the dean of the Faculty of International and Political Studies, and of Prof. Zdzisław Mach – the well-known sociologist and social anthropologist researching the problems of the cultural shaping of identity, it was to be turned into the Centre for Holocaust Studies. The necessity to develop research and education in this field is best summed up in the words of Prof. W. Kozub-Ciembroniewicz during the inauguration of the unit on the 17th of January 2008, who emphasised the need to view the Holocaust as an event that took place in Europe and which cannot be analysed in isolation from its geographical and cultural context. Therefore it is the university's duty to research the Holocaust. Professor Kozub-Ciembroniewicz, in fulfilling the function of Academic Council Head, takes care to ensure the Centre's continuous development and broadening, as well as representing the Centre in external contacts. Professor Z. Mach supported, and continues to support the Centre, initially as the director of the Institute of European Studies, and later as a member of the Centre's Academic Council. Without the involvement and interest of these professors, the Centre would not have become what it is today. The involvement of both professors in the establishment of the UNESCO Chair is also not undervalued as this is one of the Centre's flagship projects.

The Centre is not the only institution in Poland involved in research into the Holocaust, but it is an institution that works in its entirety for the research, education and remembrance of the Holocaust.

One of the Centre's most important achievements was the launch of an MA programme for the academic year 2011/2012 in knowledge about the Holocaust and totalitarianism. This degree is interdisciplinary in character and shows the Holocaust within a European perspective. The second key programme is the Summer School 'Teachings on the Holocaust,' organised annually since 2006. The aim of the School is to educate teachers, local leaders, and the representatives of non-government organisations about the Holocaust, and in particular about effective teaching methods on the subject and how to develop tolerance and openness in pupils. The Centre also tries to bring these difficult subjects closer to Cracow society through the organisation of meetings with academics, artists, social authorities, whose work and experiences allow for a better understanding of the tragedy that was the Holocaust. The Centre has organised meetings with Prof. Michael Berenbaum, the historian and film director, a professor at the American Jewish University; Prof. Shimon Redlich, a historian at the Ben Gurion University in Israel; Prof. Robert Wistrich, director of The Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, and with the well-known Polish film director Andrzej Wajda. The Centre is involved in the organisation and co-organisation of conferences, seminars and discussion panels, during which it is possible to present the latest results and achievements in research and teaching on the Holocaust. It is worth recalling here that for two years the Centre, in conjunction with the Festival of Jewish Culture, has organised an open discussion panel for the general public during the Festival.

The above activities would not have been possible without the charisma and involvement of the Centre's director – Dr. Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs. Her many years of experience, both in terms of teaching at such centres as Oxford and Cambridge, and in the capacity of an expert through her participation in an advisory unit on education about the Holocaust at the Polish Ministry of Education and in the Polish government delegation in the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (formerly the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research) has allowed the Centre's tasks to be successfully mapped out and effectively realised. Dr. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs has immense experience in international cooperation with units involved in the Holocaust and related subjects, something that has made the creation of a sizeable network partnership for the Centre all the easier. Her efforts have been rewarded: she has received the Irena Sendlerowa Prize, given by the Taube Centre to Poles of non-Jewish provenance involved in work to preserve the cultural heritage of Jews and the restoration of Jewish culture in Poland. The above initiatives are of immense importance given that the Holocaust happened chiefly on Polish occupied territory and it is in Poland that six German Second World War death camps can be found. This his-

torical burden obliges Poles, in my opinion, even more so than other nations to confront this great tragedy and to remember it. The activities of the Jagiellonian University – and those of the Centre in particular – show that attempts to understand and commemorate the past were and are being undertaken.

The decision to open a UNESCO Chair on Holocaust Education at the Jagiellonian University was met with enthusiasm by institutions in Poland, Europe and the world. The Centre received several dozen letters of intent, in which institutions expressed their support and willingness to cooperate with the future Chair. Amongst those worth mentioning are: the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, the Pedagogical University in Cracow, the International Centre for Youth Meetings and the Jewish Centre in Oświęcim, the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, the Jewish Social Centre in Cracow, the Galicia Jewish Museum, the Wannsee Conference House in Berlin, the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem, The Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York, The Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Centre in Skokie, The Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, Humanity in Action, the Elie Wiesel Centre for Judaic Studies, Miami Dade College and the Ariel University Centre of Samaria in Israel. The majority of the mentioned organisations have cooperated with the Centre for years and participate in joint programmes and projects, such as with the International House for Youth Meetings and the annual conference *Auschwitz i Holokaust na tle zbrodni ludobójstwa w XX i XXI wieku* [Auschwitz and the Holocaust against the background of 20th- and 21st-century crimes of genocide], workshops conducted by Centre members for the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage or the already mentioned Summer School: ‘Teachings on the Holocaust’.

The Chair’s main aim will be educating about the Holocaust in an interdisciplinary approach. Key will be the incorporation of the historical, political, sociological, psychological, legal, philosophical and cultural aspects. Teaching will also relate to a significant degree with the concepts of remembrance and the significance of the Holocaust for European society, it will constitute an attempt to come to terms with the notion of genocide, its general roots, not merely on the European continent but equally in Asia and Africa.

The task within the teaching is not merely the conveyance of knowledge but also the transfer of good models and tested, effective forms of practice. On the basis of the experience gained through the Summer School ‘Teachings on the Holocaust’, the Chair intends to educate those teachers who have the greatest potential to convey knowledge about the Holocaust during their classes, in particular teachers of the humanities. Of immense importance is the already mentioned educational and moral aspect, the forging within young people of an active, involved attitude, a responsibility for the community in which they live and, simultaneously, trust and openness towards

those of different orientations and outlooks, from national and ethnic minorities. An avoidance of stigmatization, recourse to stereotypes and unsubstantiated manifestations of hostility will enable the construction of a better world. In order to realise these goals, an extension of the courses on offer as part of current MA degree programmes is planned to include ones linked to notions of genocide, gender and multiculturalism. A similar direction will be taken on the already existing Ph.D. programme at the Institute of European Studies – ‘Auschwitz and the Holocaust.’ A new element introduced by the Chair will be post-graduate courses for both students and teachers. The priority here will be education in the spirit of tolerance and active opposition to manifestations of racism, xenophobia and discrimination.

The Chair intends to expand the programme of guest lectures, which enjoys tremendous popularity amongst students. This has been practiced by the Centre for Holocaust Studies in recent years and the first course: *Aspects of the Holocaust* was run by Dr. Wolf Kaiser, Director for Education at the Wannsee Conference House. In the subsequent year, Prof. Moshe Zimmermann of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem was invited and gave the course *Antisemitism, Nazism and the Holocaust in German and American Film*. The third course was on the Jewish Diaspora in the USA and was taught by Dr. Sebastian Rejak of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Chair has set itself ambitious plans. Amongst these is academic research. The Chair plans an innovative research project aimed at delimitating the framework for didactic standards on the Holocaust. The first stage of the work will be establishing how the Holocaust is taught both in state schools and institutions of higher education, both during workshops and programmes conducted by non-government organisations. The establishing of the state of this teaching will allow one to evaluate the teaching programmes, and in a subsequent stage to designate good practices and effective solutions which will serve educators during their work.

Another project is the documentation of places of mass murder and execution within Central-Eastern Europe. The examination of these places, their cataloguing and marking on the map of Europe will, on the one hand, allow for the supplementing of gaps in historical knowledge, while on the other a bringing closer of this information to local communities and therein aiding a coming to terms with this most difficult of pasts. The marking of places of execution will also allow them to be included within local education frameworks; pupils in coming into contact with authentic places in which the Holocaust occurred will be able to feel empathy for the victims of the genocide.

The Chair intends to also develop a programme of workshops within the framework of the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet) started in 1953. This aims to propagate the idea of international cooperation

amongst children and young people as well as bring about mutual understanding. At present almost 9,600 educational institutions from 180 countries participate. These are institutions from various rungs of the educational ladder – from nursery schools to teacher training centres. Amongst the subjects conducted at the schools are education for peace and human rights as well as dialogue amongst cultures and religions. It is the intention of the Chair to operate in this area, preparing workshops connected with the need to uphold human rights, develop open attitudes to otherness and tolerance towards those of differing views, different denominations, origins etc. The duty to teach about human rights clearly derives from the experiences of the totalitarian systems of the twentieth century, nonetheless there is still an absence of an effective implementation of these issues into the education system. The Chair hopes to close this gap.

The world in which we live constantly utilises image and visual narrative. In order to meet the challenges of the contemporary world, the Chair plans to conduct film workshops in which its own visual materials will be used for didactic aims. The Holocaust is not only given wide coverage in academic literature and fiction but is also represented in an array of valuable and significant film and popular culture portrayals. The Chair intends to raise questions as to the educational value of these representations, their value not only morally but also aesthetically, as well as about issues of who, and in what way, has the right to talk about the Holocaust. These controversial although most necessary of questions should force workshop participants to reflect deeply on the ways in which the Holocaust is presented in culture.

During the 34th Session of the UNESCO General Conference in 2007 resolution no. 34C/61 was adopted, which committed states to actively involve themselves in raising awareness of the Holocaust. These acts were designed to counter attempts to negate knowledge about the Holocaust as a historical event. The Jagiellonian University and in particular one of its units – the Centre for Holocaust Studies – has been pursuing this goal for years. The excellent education and experience of its staff, the broad network of cooperating institutions as well as the range of projects which have been realised are proof enough of this. The most important fact is, however, that there still exists an awareness for a need to teach people about the Holocaust, that tragedy of the twentieth century from which, sadly, humanity has not learnt its lesson. After all, we have personally witnessed subsequent mass acts of murder, ethnic cleansing and genocide – for example in Rwanda in 1994. There is an awareness that the education of young people, although difficult and wanting, is necessary for the creation of attitudes of tolerance and the acceptance of difference. Improvement in the present world is only possible through the bringing up of a sensitive young generation. Such an awareness and such a goal has guided the creation of the UNESCO Chair for Holocaust Education at the Jagiellonian University.