

precedents, looking for new strategies.

Before the International Commission's June 2004 meeting in Jerusalem, I pressed the U.S. State Department, America's formal representative on the Commission, to adopt a more aggressive stance, to no avail. When I proposed that the State Department might hint at a possible reduction in America's sizeable contribution to the ICRC's budget and suggest that, if no progress were made, we consider withdrawing from ITS the millions of documents deposited there by American military forces, I was accused of wanting to "toss a bomb onto the negotiating table." I was told that the official stance of the United States was to hope that some other country might press the access issue!

I had no bomb to toss, only a pen. On Memorial Day weekend in 2004, as the new World War II Memorial was being dedicated in Washington, I wrote in protest to the State Department expressing my belief that the American failure to act was "...cementing the place of our own country as part of the problem rather than part of the solution....In the face of a dying generation of World War II veterans...the United States [has] opened the earth and dedicates a granite monument....In the face of a dying generation of Holocaust survivors, who suffered the full fury of the Nazis and their allies, we are unable to...lay open a pile of paper that tells their story....This will not be a chapter of Holocaust history we will be proud to teach to future generations of Americans."

I enlisted Ben Meed, president of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and a Warsaw ghetto survivor, to write a strongly worded letter to the International Commission demanding access. The president of the German Studies Association of the United States, Henry Friedlander, a survivor of the Lodz ghetto, did the same. But neither the voices of these survivors nor my own made an impact.

Was there another world forum that might prove more responsive?

#### INTERNATIONAL TASK FORCE

In December 2003, the twenty-country International Task Force on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research

met in Washington, D.C. Created on the initiative of Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson, Task Force members were committed to principles enunciated in the Stockholm Declaration of 2000. One called for open access to Holocaust-related archives.

At the final plenary I raised the ITS access issue.

To break the logjam over conflicting national privacy laws, and to bring the ITS documentation closer to survivors and other potential users, I proposed for the first time publicly that copies of the entire archive be placed at Holocaust research centers in the eleven International Commission member states and be made accessible under the respective national laws and privacy practices.

The Task Force chair, from the U.S. State Department, ruled my intervention inappropriate because ITS was not on the agenda, but many NGO representatives at the meeting expressed interest in learning more. Moreover, nine of the eleven countries on the ITS International Commission were members of the Task Force and thus committed, through the Stockholm Declaration, to open access to Holocaust-related archives. Could these states commit to openness in the Task Force and at the same time obstruct access in the ITS Commission? This was an angle worth pursuing.

For the International Task Force's June 2004 meeting in Rome, I wrote a "white paper" which described the contents of the ITS archive and explained the systematic evasion of decision-making responsibility that resulted from the arcane set of relationships among the International Commission, the German Interior Ministry (which funds ITS), the ITS director (an ICRC employee), and the ICRC in Geneva. Describing the massive backlog of unanswered survivor requests, I urged immediate Task Force involvement.

The head of the U.S. delegation to the Task Force, who had already accused me of wanting to "toss bombs," disavowed the "white paper" because it had not been—and he assured me would not have been—cleared in advance, but participants picked up 150 copies the first day and even more on day two. On day three, Task Force members passed a

unanimous resolution calling for the immediate opening of the ITS archives! Task Force representatives followed the resolution with a visit to Bad Arolsen, where they experienced firsthand ITS's "closed-door, share-no-information" policy. I gained allies, and two additional Task Force resolutions followed.

With these resolutions in hand, I could turn to the media.

#### GOING PUBLIC

In May 2005, just before the International Commission gathered in Rome, a longtime friend and fellow synagogue member at Temple Rodef Shalom in Falls Church, Virginia wrote an article, "Pressure Mounts to Open Holocaust Records," for the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* which was syndicated online and to outlets across the U.S. That same month, a German writer with whom I'd been in touch blasted ITS as a "bureaucratic dinosaur" in the influential German newspaper *Die Zeit*, while hailing ITS's archival holdings as a monument at least equal in importance to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe that was about to be dedicated in Berlin. *Die Zeit* also published a lead editorial calling the ITS situation a "scandal."

The warning was clear: If the ITS problem were not solved, the Berlin memorial, in which the German government was so heavily invested both financially and symbolically, might open amid controversy.

Two weeks later, it was clear that this strategy was having an impact: The 2005 International Commission meeting in Rome was fraught with complaints about the public scrutiny, vehement arguments, and unscheduled recesses to allow tempers to cool and strategies to be reconsidered. Still, Germany, Italy, and Belgium, supported by the ICRC and the ITS director, insisted on unanimity for any decision, and asserted they would not endorse a decision to act. When the Italian chair refused to call a vote, stating that nothing less than full consensus would be "legitimate," six countries joined together to authorize creation of a committee of experts, with each country allowed to select its own participants. With the chair still insisting that the move was "illegitimate," dates