

STATEMENT

BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR INVESTIGATION OF CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY.
27 JANUARY 1999, TALLINN

The International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against Humanity, established by Mr Lennart Meri, President of the Republic of Estonia, held its first session on 26–27 January 1999, in Tallinn. The session was attended by the following members of the Commission: Minister Max Jakobson (Chairman), Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, Paul Goble, Nicholas Lane, Arseny Roginsky and Wolfgang Freiherr von Stetten.

The Session was opened by President Meri who presented his views on the task of the Commission. “The creation of this commission reflects our hope in Estonia that shining the bright light of truth on some of the tragedies of the past will not only contribute to reconciliation within our society and its further reintegration into the international community of nations but also help to prevent the repetition of such tragedies elsewhere,” the President said.

“This commission is committed to setting out in as clear terms as possible what crimes against humanity happened in Estonia. It is committed to overcoming the stereotypes about groups that were the basis of many of these crimes: After all, most of these crimes were possible only because some governments and movements used stereotypes in place of the uniqueness of the human person in their dealings with others. It is committed to eliminating any double standards in the assessment of particular events. Crimes against humanity are crimes against humanity regardless of who commits them. And it is committed to compiling a record sufficiently well-documented and complete that no one will be able to deny what happened or to avoid facing up to the facts,” the President continued.

President Meri added that the commission is not and does not intend to act as a judicial or prosecutorial body. Its members are not judges and do not intend to act as such. They are not trying to compile a set of facts in order to launch judicial actions against anyone or any institution, either here in Estonia or elsewhere.

After a detailed discussion of its mandate and the organisation of its work, the Commission decided that the investigation would focus on crimes against humanity committed during three distinct historical periods:

1. The occupation of Estonia by Soviet forces in 1940–1941,
2. The occupation of Estonia by German forces in 1941–1944,
3. The second Soviet occupation beginning in 1944.

The Commission instructed two teams of historians to gather all available documentary material and interview possible witnesses. One team will concentrate on the periods of Soviet occupation, the other with the period of German occupation. Mr. Toomas Hiio will direct and co-ordinate the work of the two teams.

In addition to the investigation of crimes against humanity, the Commission also decided that a summary of the historical context of the events under investigation should be prepared.