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VIENNA

ANTI-SEMITISM CONFERENCE

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I am a Frenchman born in Paris. My parents were poor Jewish immigrants from Russia, who met and married in Paris. My mother arrived in Paris in 1906, after the pogroms in Kichinev. My father left the Soviet Union in 1921, leaving behind him the Revolution for which he had fought and which had betrayed the cause of freedom. France granted them citizenship in 1928, a few months before I was born. So that makes me a Jewish child of the French Republic.

In the course of my long life I have encountered anti-Semitism in many forms. As a boy I witnessed the deadly hunt for Jews in occupied France—the **genocidal anti-Semitism** of Hitler and the Nazis. I saw **State anti-Semitism** at work through the laws of oppression and exclusion of the Vichy regime. I observed the **religious anti-Semitism** that taught hatred of the Jewish people regarded as deicidal, a teaching long propounded by the Christian churches, the Catholic Church in particular. I have experienced **populist anti-Semitism**, that system of lies and loathsome stereotypes depicting Jews as greedy, arrogant, scheming, hating others, and dreaming of subjugating and dominating them. Laughable, when one knows the tragic history of the Jewish people and its litany of humiliation and suffering! And lastly, in recent years, I have witnessed the emergence of a contemporary expression of anti-Semitism in the guise of **anti-Zionism**.

It is a remarkable fact that this most recent avatar of anti-Semitism has taken over from the traditional forms of anti-Semitism. State anti-Semitism no longer exists, for no State, since the end of the Second World War, would dare introduce anti-Jewish laws. Quite the reverse: today the democratic States actively combat anti-Semitism. In France, for instance, all forms of incitement to anti-Semitic hatred or discrimination are severely dealt with by the law and the courts. As President Chirac said it a few weeks ago, “*Anti-Semitism is the negation of all moral values of France. Anti-Semitic actions ought to be fought constantly and prosecuted with utmost sternness !*”.

As for religious anti-Semitism, the Churches have become aware of their responsibility for the persistence of anti-Semitism and no longer teach contempt for the Jews. The progress made in this respect is irreversible, and I welcome the considerable efforts accomplished, especially by the Catholic Church since Vatican II.

True, an element of populist anti-Semitism persists in varying degrees, depending on the society. This fuels the anti-Semitism of the far right, with its nostalgia for the pre-war era when hatred of Jews was respectable and found expression in virulent forms. Indeed, a few groups of young little nazis, their scalp shaved longing for the SS, here and then, damaged Jewish graves and synagogues. But that anti-Semitism is of minor importance in democratic societies. It cannot be expressed openly, since memories of the Holocaust forbid the far right parties from publicly promoting anti-Semitism for fear of being tarred with the brush of Nazism and, like it, of being branded and rejected by virtually the entire population of the democratic nations, France especially. It is a mistake, in that respect, to see Mr Le Pen’s success in the 2002 French presidential election as signalling a resurgence of traditional anti-Semitism. Although racism does partly inspire Le Pen’s electorate, that racism is primarily anti-Arab. I would remind you that the profanation of the Jewish cemetery in Carpentras—wrongly attributed to followers of Le Pen—sparked a huge

demonstration of popular outrage. More than half a million people demonstrated in Paris, including the leading politicians, among them the President himself, François Mitterrand, an event without parallel in the history of France.

In actual fact, the current upsurge of anti-Semitism in France and other countries in Europe is primarily anti-Zionist in inspiration. Nothing could be more meaningful, in that respect, than to analyse the acts of anti-Semitic violence committed in France over the past ten years. In 1992, there were 20 recorded acts of anti-Semitic violence. Then their number dwindled significantly between 1992 and 1998: three in 1997, just one in 1998. In 1999, on the other hand, there were 9 acts of anti-Semitism. The figures explode starting in 2000, with 119. Practically all of them, 114, occurred after 28 September 2000 and the outbreak of the Second Intifada and the Israeli-Palestinian clashes, which were widely reported on television. Still more noteworthy, of the 193 acts recorded in 2002, the majority took place after Tsahal's offensive in the West Bank and the resurgence of suicide attacks against the Israeli population in Spring 2002, especially during Passover. These acts of anti-Semitic violence injured 17 people; fortunately there were no deaths. Their perpetrators, meanwhile, are hard to identify and arrest due to the nature of these events. However, out of 77 people arrested, 55 are of North African origin and 6 of African origin; all hail from the "sensitive" suburban neighbourhoods, notably around Paris. Less serious, though equally worrying for the future, is the deteriorating climate in secondary schools in these neighbourhoods. Jewish pupils there are increasingly the targets of verbal abuse, and teachers now find it practically impossible to teach about the Shoah without arousing hostility on the part of pupils who equate today's Palestinians with the Jewish victims of the past, and Tsahal with the SS.

This is how current anti-Semitism takes its origin most acutely from anti-Zionism or, more precisely, from the animosity and, at times, from the hatred Israel arouses within the Muslim world, particularly within Arab communities.

Of course, in their public statements the responsible leaders underscore that their support to the Palestinian cause is not to be considered as hostility against the Jews as such. They forcefully reject any accusation of anti-Semitism, even if some of them declare themselves to be anti-Zionists. But many people in the Arab world are not acquainted with those distinctions. To their mind, Israelis are Jews, and Jews are Israelis in their hearts if not by nationality. The Palestinian cause has become theirs. And for the most excited of them and the youngest ones, laying into Jews in Europe is something like reproducing Intifada in the European suburbs, including in France. They view themselves as militants of the Palestinian cause whereas they become offenders moved by their hatred for the Zionists to whom they liken all Jews.

This basic anti-Semitism is echoed with the one developing in some far-left groupings. They have made theirs the sufferings of the Palestinians and their tragedy. By reversing the perspective they consider this being the contemporary expression of the tragedy of those Jews persecuted in the recent past. While condemning terrorism, they ascribe the primarily responsibility for it to the Israeli government and its colonisation policy. They energetically deny of taking any anti-Semite posture. But their clear support for the Palestinians in this conflict has reinforced the anti-Israeli trend in the media and sustained anti-Zionism, which is in turn feeding anti-Semitism.

We are here facing a situation which never happened before in the never-ending history of anti-semitism. And which is particularly difficult to reduce. Because it is on behalf of the sufferings endured by the Palestinian people that its supporters in the world take it out not only on Israel, but on Jews. Thus, the Middle-East conflict has boosted again anti-semitism, hidden under the features of anti-sionism, with an intensity and a violence unknown since the Shoah.

How can we fight this? Obviously, we should all work for a just peace in the Middle East. But meanwhile? First we must unmask the type of anti-Zionism that places all of the blame on Israeli government policy when in

reality this is just another face of anti-Semitism. We should denounce bias in media coverage of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Above all, leaders of the Jewish and Arab communities should join forces to send a message that the tragedy of the Middle East must not be reproduced in the housing estates and poor neighbourhoods of Europe or elsewhere, wherever Jews and Arabs live side by side under the same laws. Never has the need to respect others, their dignity, their physical integrity and their religion been as great as in these difficult times. It is up to us to work for that, to repeat over and over that tolerance and civil peace are virtues and benefits for everyone, regardless of their origin.

In conclusion, I would like to recall the obvious: anti-Semitism is not only a contemptible prejudice or a passion full of hatred. Anti-Semitism is criminal. It gashed History with a long bloody furrow, the Shoah being the ultimate and abominable expression of it. But anti-Semitism does not only affect Jews. Indeed, the whole of human kind is affected by a Jewish child thrown into a gas chamber in Auschwitz because it was denied by the Nazis of being recognised as a human being. Combating anti-Semitism just as combating racism is thus of concern to each and everyone, be they Jews or not. This fight is encompassed in the noble cause of human rights. It must be fought relentlessly and everywhere.

This is the *raison d'être* of this conference.

I thank you.
