

Combating Anti-Semitism in the OSCE Region

Eric Fusfield
B'nai B'rith International
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Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates:

In 2014 we honored the 10th anniversary of the OSCE Berlin Conference on Anti-Semitism and the historic declaration that emerged from that gathering. But the review conference that took place in Berlin that fall underscored that much work remains to be done. The past two years have seen a wave of anti-Israel demonstrations throughout the OSCE region; these gatherings have typically featured blatantly anti-Semitic themes and have often turned violent. Attacks on Jewish individuals and institutions have increased in frequency and intensity, as the landscape from Belgium to Bulgaria, Germany to Greece, Holland to Hungary, and Ireland to Italy has witnessed violence against Jewish targets. This spread of hatred has been accompanied by a corrosion of the public discourse with respect to Jews and Israel and has left European Jewry fearful for their safety and security.

As a result of anti-Semitic attacks, nearly 10,000 Jews emigrated from Western Europe to Israel last year, the highest-ever number from that region. Furthermore, a recent survey of European Jewish leaders indicated that membership and participation in Jewish institutions has declined, at the same time that security has, of necessity, been increased. This Sunday night the holiday of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish new year, will begin. Across the continent, synagogue attendance is expected to suffer as a result of fear about openly practicing Judaism.

The rise of anti-Jewish hatred has also resulted in a proliferation of anti-Semitic propaganda, much of which is directed against the State of Israel. Tragically, the demonization and delegitimization of the Jewish state has become a daily occurrence, as Israel's enemies repeatedly accuse it of being a Nazi-like occupier and an apartheid state that disenfranchises the Palestinians. Falsehoods about Israel are repeated so often that they become widely accepted in the popular culture and sometimes impact government policy. The effort by Israel's relentless critics to denigrate the Jewish state is not only evidence that anti-Semitism is alive and well 70 years after the Holocaust – this new variation of the world's oldest social illness actually poses a security threat to the Jewish state by intensifying its international isolation.

For more than a decade, the OSCE has taken up the urgent struggle against rising anti-Semitism. High-level conferences in Vienna in 2003 and Berlin in 2004 and 2014, among other gatherings, have focused a needed spotlight on this and other forms of intolerance.

The historic 2004 Berlin Declaration, which provided a series of important recommendations for governments to follow in combating anti-Semitism, specifically addressed the growing problem of anti-Semitic attacks being committed by opponents of Israel's policies.

The passage stating that “international developments or political issues, including those in Israel or elsewhere in the Middle East, never justify anti-Semitism” stands as an important rebuff to those who try to justify hate crimes with politics.

Permanent Council Decision No. 607, which preceded the 2004 Berlin Conference, and subsequent Ministerial decisions, represent vital affirmations of the OSCE’s commitment to fight anti-Semitism and related forms of racism and xenophobia. That pact has been bolstered by the creation of ODIHR’s indispensable tolerance and non-discrimination unit, which carries out this important work each day and which includes an expert advisor on anti-Semitism, and by the appointment of the Chairman-in-Office’s three personal representatives on combating intolerance.

This spring the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) adopted a working definition of anti-Semitism that clearly illustrates the dimensions of the problem. The time has come for the OSCE to follow suit. The Hamburg Ministerial Council in December should approve a working definition of anti-Semitism based on the IHRA model, one that should then be widely promoted within the OSCE to educate public officials, journalists, teachers, and others about the contemporary manifestations of anti-Semitism.

While much has been done to fight anti-Semitism in the past decade or more, much work remains. The need for practical and effective strategies to combat and defeat this pathology is still crucial. To this end,

- We must continue to affirm commitments made at the landmark 2004 conference and reiterated at subsequent conferences and assess the implementation of those commitments.
- We must enhance funding for ODIHR’s Tolerance and Non-Discrimination unit, which has now become a fixed and integral part of the OSCE’s work. We must enable the TND unit to sustain and expand its critical activities, which include educational programs on anti-Semitism in more than a dozen countries.
- We must extend, for the foreseeable future, the terms of the three personal representatives on intolerance.
- Member-states must fulfill their reporting requirements with respect to hate crimes data. Far too few governments have done so until now.
- Finally, we must strongly reinforce the crucial principle declared at the 2004 Berlin Conference – That no political position, cause or grievance can ever justify anti-Semitism – and make clear that the demonization and delegitimization of the Jewish state is often none other than a pretext for the hatred of Jews themselves.