

**OSCE CONFERENCE ON COMBATING DISCRIMINATION AND PROMOTING
MUTUAL RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING**
Follow-up to the Cordoba Conference on Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance

Remarks AS GIVEN
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Chairman, United States Commission on Security and Cooperation
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Thank you. I would like to associate myself with the remarks of His Royal Highness Prince el Hassan bin Talal of Jordan. I am privileged today to address this conference as the representative of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. And as Chairman of the United States Helsinki Commission. I am pleased to be here with so many friends, our U.S. Ambassador Julie Finley, the U.S. delegation led by my colleague Congressman Eric Cantor, and Professor Gert Weisskirchen.

This conference, as many of you know, is an outgrowth of the work begun by the Assembly in 2002 in response to an alarming spike in anti-Semitic incidents and related violence.

The reality is that none of our societies is immune from the ignorance, indifference or outright hatred that fosters discrimination, intolerance, and ultimately destruction of every sort.

Faced with such social afflictions, each of us has a choice whether to remain complacent, *some might say complicit*, or to take action. From our home, school or workplace to the football stadium, town hall square or pages of our local newspaper, each of us has the ability to make a difference if he or she chooses to do so.

Many of us are elected officials. In that capacity, we must recognize our unique responsibility – no, our obligation – to combat intolerance and discrimination, as well as promoting mutual respect and understanding.

First, we have a duty to use the public platform entrusted to us to speak out when manifestations of hate occur. As Elie Wiesel has rightly observed, **“Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”**

Additionally, we can and must work to help our governments and people come to terms with the historical truths of our collective past. **Perpetuating myth as history only serves to impede this vital and healthy process.**

Education – whether at the dining room table or the formal lecture hall – is a powerful instrument for overcoming the legacy of the past, promoting social justice in the present, and building a brighter future.

As government officials and key opinion makers, we have a duty to ensure adequate resources for such programs, including Holocaust education. To be successful, we must reach out in partnership to civil society.

Members of the OSCE PA are uniquely positioned to shape laws that help define the limits of conduct in society. At times a daunting task, we face the challenge of ensuring appropriate protection of the targets of hate while preserving fundamental freedoms and human rights.

While we may differ on approaches, there can be no neutrality or silence when violence is used against an individual or group.

I have traveled across the breadth of the OSCE region and beyond in connection with my work with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

Having just been in the Middle East last week, I am mindful of the unique role the Mediterranean Partners could play in promoting mutual respect and understanding.

Having been in Kosovo two days ago, I saw the continuing plight of the Romas and the difficult tasks at hand in bringing about improvements and that region of the world.

Minority groups, including the Romas, are being forced to live on the extreme margins, denied the right to freely profess and practice their faith to ethnic and racial minorities constantly living in fear for their safety. In each instance, they simply seek the dignity that should be accorded to every human being.

Far too often there is a fixation on differences that blinds us to our common humanity.

In closing, I would note that this year marks the bicentennial of the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, which banned the slave trade in the British Empire.

The words of a courageous abolitionist in the House of Commons, William Wilberforce, should serve as an inspiration to all of us that we must take a stand no matter the seemingly insurmountable odds. "Let the consequences be what they would: I from this time determined that I would never rest until I had effected its [slavery's] abolition."

May we display such determination and dedication in our common efforts to combat anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance and discrimination and work energetically to promote mutual respect and understanding.

You and I can make a difference, if we care to. Thank you.

The forces of hatred are on the rise. As Otto Adler, a Holocaust survivor from Romania said yesterday at the Simon Wiesenthal event, the only way to combat hatred is with truth. We must speak the truth, spread the truth, and live the truth, and the truth will set us free.