



## United States Mission to the OSCE

# Statement on Education on the Holocaust and on Anti-Semitism

As delivered by Rabbi Marvin Hier  
to the Cordoba Conference on Anti-Semitism  
and on Other Forms of Intolerance  
June 8, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.

I could not help but wonder, in preparing these remarks, what the millions of men, women and children gassed at the death camps of Auschwitz, Treblinka and Majdanek during the Nazi Holocaust would think of this auspicious gathering? I'm afraid they would not believe that a mere sixty years after the Shoah, fifty-five nations have gathered once again to discuss Anti-Semitism, to once more confront the oldest form of hatred, hatred of the Jews which refuses to die. Even the greatest of the haters, Hitler himself, could only dare predict in his final will and testament that it would take a few centuries to rekindle Anti-Semitism.

What shall we say to the remaining survivors of the Holocaust? That a mere six decades later, Anti-Semitism has a home again in France, England, Belgium, Holland, Germany and throughout Europe and Eurasia, and especially in the Middle East. Despite the fact that throughout history Jews have been an endangered species, encountering crusades, the Inquisition, pogroms and the Shoah, they still cannot escape being the favorite target of every bigot and extremist.

As always, there are those eager to deflect the truth by shifting the blame to the victims themselves as was the case in the 1930s when Nazi storm troopers blamed the Jews with their slogan, "The Jews stabbed Germany in the back." Today, once again, the perpetrators insist that it is Israeli policy that is responsible for all these attacks. While it is legitimate to criticize a government's policy - any government, it is quite another matter when that criticism spills over into a message of collective hatred of an entire people and an attack on Judaism itself. It is especially the case when that message of hate is delivered by the world's teachers, including spiritual leaders and writers, who should be role models for tolerance, whose words are then carried by satellite and the Internet and transmitted around the world.

Like the words of Sheikh Ibrahim Mudairis, who delivered a sermon broadcast on Palestinian television, for which he was subsequently condemned by Palestinian Chairman Mahmoud Abbas, that said in part, "The Jews are the cancer spreading all over the world...Jews are responsible for all wars and conflicts...Do not ask what Germany did to the Jews, but what the Jews did to Germany...." Is that hate or politics?

Or the words of a Nobel Laureate carried around the world, who wrote, "Contaminated by the monstrous...certitude that there exist a people chosen by G-d...trained in the idea that any

suffering...inflicted on everyone else, especially the Palestinians, will always be inferior to that which they suffered...the Jews endlessly scratch their own wound and keep it bleeding to keep it incurable, as if it were a banner...Israel in short is a racist State by virtue of Judaism's monstrous doctrines, not just against the Palestinians but against the entire world which it seeks to manipulate and abuse." Those are not the words of hope and moderation that one has a right to expect from religious leaders, teachers and men of letters.

What can be done to expunge this hatred, to prevent this conference, however well intended, from ending in failure? For let us be clear, the enemies we face are not just the enemies of the Jews, they are the enemies of Western civilization as well. If they rose to power today, they would first purge the Jews, and then tomorrow would begin ridding themselves of anybody that they perceive as different. We all have a stake in the war against hate and we all must be on the frontlines in an effort to defeat it.

But the decisive battle for a more humane world must be waged and won in the classroom, where teaching tolerance must take center stage, and where a student's education must be anchored in the principles of human dignity and mutual respect. As a Holocaust survivor speaking to a teachers' seminar once implored: "Dear Teachers: I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness: gas chambers built by learned engineers, children poisoned by physicians, infants killed by nurses. So I am suspicious of education. My request is - help your students become human. Never produce "educated Eichmanns." The terrorists, who brought down the twin towers and those who blew up the trains in Madrid or the buses in Jerusalem, deliberately murdering thousands of innocent civilians were not taught those basic tenants of humanity. As Rene Dubois once put it, "Human diversity makes tolerance more than a virtue, it makes it a requirement for survival."

That is why we built the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles and the New York Tolerance Center, and why we are building the Center For Human Dignity in Jerusalem, to give a permanent address to the principles of human dignity and mutual respect, because these core issues will be the dominant themes of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Millions of people from all walks of life have visited the Museum of Tolerance, where we have trained well over 100,000 police and schoolteachers nationwide in diversity and anti-bias training through our Tools For Tolerance Programs, helping them meet unprecedented challenges in serving an increasingly diverse, rapidly changing society. Where our permanent installations include, not only major exhibits on the Holocaust, but a multimedia social laboratory on our contemporary world, dealing with hate and man's inhumanity to man in such places as Bosnia, Rwanda, and the Sudan, and confronting the global issues of international terrorism, AIDS, and the exploitation of women and children.

The Museum of Tolerance's primary focus is on young people – recognizing their potential as responsible citizens, as well as revealing the peril of ignorance and hatred to their future. Utilizing state of the art teaching technologies, the Museum of Tolerance and the innovative New York Tolerance Center are powerful educational resources for positive youth development and empowerment. Specialized, age-appropriate programs and activities expand on the core experience and challenge students to assume greater personal responsibility in recognizing and rejecting all forms of discrimination and in dealing more sensitively with others.

The profound impact this institution makes on the lives of thousands of students and front line professionals each year is measured in program evaluations and expressed in letters and comments. For example:

A policeman from Riverside County said, “This was a life-changing experience for me.” A student from Chapman University wrote, “I realized that I have the power to stop hate. Hate is weak when it stands alone, but strong when it is united. I have the ability to keep it from growing.”

And a U.S. District Court Judge from Minnesota left a National Institute Against Hate Crimes and Terrorism at the Museum of Tolerance saying: “I strongly believe that I am a better person, and therefore, will be a better judge as I approach these important and complex issues.”

Furthermore, these experiential learning opportunities have spawned numerous practical initiatives, from grass roots efforts to new legislation, for the betterment of communities throughout the country.

Recognizing that learning – and living – the lessons of tolerance spans a lifetime and bridges generations, the Museum of Tolerance reaches out to the broad community with acclaimed public programming, landmark exhibitions, conferences and symposia on pressing social issues and global human rights concerns, and a distinguished Arts and Lectures Series with important filmmakers and authors.

Here are some suggestions for the OSCE:

- Encourage the establishment of a major museum/resource center in every country to help educate and focus people on these vital issues;
- Establish an OSCE lending library of films and DVDs on intolerance in various languages for distribution to schools and religious centers;
- Create a poster series on the Holocaust for distribution to all OSCE member states;
- Hold a future conference at a location that houses such a major facility in order to encourage discussion and help stimulate new material for use in educational programs;
- Post an OSCE compliance record sheet that would track each country’s implementation record.

The task is overwhelming. But as *Ethics of the Fathers* teaches us, “It is not for us to complete the task, but neither are we free to desist from it.” And as Albert Einstein reminded all of us, the world is a dangerous place to live, not because of the people who are evil, but because of those people who don’t do anything about it.

We have the ability to make of our world an oasis of tolerance and a safer place for our children and grandchildren.

Thank you.