

Statement by Edgar M. Bronfman, World Jewish Congress

Foreign Minister Moratinos

Foreign Minister Rupel

My good friend Governor Pataki.

The OSCE has played an important role in the establishment of human rights in Europe. This organization was critical in protecting Soviet dissidents thirty years ago. Then Foreign Minister Sheveradnadze told me and Israel Singer of the freedoms the Soviet Union was about to grant Soviet Jews to live in dignity and to be able to practice their religion, which he was about to announce at a meeting of the OSCE.

Last year in Berlin, the conference began to fight a perplexing new challenge, the revival of anti-Semitism. This anti-Semitism, the oldest hate, has reemerged in the aftermath of the Holocaust where the world witnessed how horribly low man's inhumanity to man could descend. For over half a century, we have experienced a bloody struggle between Israel, created by the United Nations as a result of the Holocaust, and the Palestinians, who also have rights in the Middle East.

That struggle has become an excuse for a revival of anti-Semitism in the last few years. We have seen many incidents of Jew hatred. There certainly can be legitimate criticism of Israel. But let us not forget that as a state under constant siege since its inception, it must protect its citizens and fight to survive as the Jewish state.

But whatever mistakes Israel may make, it is not a reason for the burning of a synagogue in Lugano, or the bombing of a Jewish owned pastry shop in Paris, or the stabbing of a Jewish teenager on a street in Antwerp, or the assault against a Jewish family returning home from Sabbath services in Essex.

The Middle East struggle has re-energized a millennia old anti-Semitism. It is illegitimate and it has to stop; it has to be stopped.

The Holocaust and the attempted extermination of the entire Jewish population of Europe was not a German affair alone. There were other willing executioners. Now, we continue to experience repeats of anti-Semitic brutality – Ukraine and Russia stand out for our most immediate concern. Just two days ago, a Moscow court acquitted Victor Kor CHA ginn, who has propagated the blood libel myth and accused the Jews of killing five boys for ritual purposes. The road of hate takes us to violence – and it must be stopped.

I am at a loss to understand why vicious anti-Israel rhetoric exists when Israel's Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, is making such a decisive effort to bring peace to the region. We all know that a vast majority of Israelis want to end the conflict, to have a democratic Palestinian state living side by side with Israel, and are at one with the Prime Minister.

In Berlin last year, U. S. Secretary of State Colin Powell put it succinctly. He said: "It is not anti-Semitic to criticize the state of Israel, but the line is crossed when Israel or its leaders are demonized or vilified, for example by the use of Nazi symbols and racist caricatures."

That line is crossed when Ariel Sharon is depicted in a newspaper cartoon as a monster devouring Palestinian babies. That line is crossed when an otherwise respectable academic organization such as the U.K.'s Association of University Teachers, boycotts Haifa and Bar Ilan Universities. That decision has been reversed, but the sting remains! It is reminiscent of the Neurenberg laws and Hitler's actions with Guttenburg University. Haifa University has some 25% Arab students. Both Universities are places where freedom of expression is practiced daily and where mutual respect and understanding between Arabs and Jews is encouraged and is lived.

Mutual respect and understanding between all faiths and peoples is the key to ending hatred and to creating a better world. And while I'm on that subject, I consider desecration to any holy book an insult to me. Desecration of the Koran, the Torah, or the Christian Testament, or any religious site, for that matter, should be offensive to all of us. Mutual respect means just that; you respect me and what I stand for, and I respect you and that which you stand for.

I urge the OSCE to further the path outlined last year in Berlin, to teach mutual respect in schools. Distinguished scholars and educators should create curricula which will be both exciting and effective in teaching not only the awful results of hatred and bias, but also the benefits that would accrue to all of us.

Much has been achieved through the dialogue between the Jews and the Catholic Church. We have also made significant progress with the Orthodox Church. We must extend those dialogues to include the Protestant churches and Islam. We, all children of Abraham, should learn what we have in common. After that, our differences will look quite insignificant.

Last year in Berlin, 55 nations singularly and unambiguously condemned anti-Semitism and committed to specific practical steps to combat it. They included coordinated monitoring and reporting, stronger legislation and enforcement, and importantly, education. Many nations have taken partial steps to fulfill these commitments; others have failed miserably to do so.

In the United States last year, the Congress passed and President Bush signed a bill that not only condemned anti-Semitism in all its ugly forms and manifestations, but also ordered the United States Department of State to create an office specifically to monitor anti-Semitism and publish its results.

The challenge to the OSCE is to continue to give teeth to the monitoring programs designed to expose and stamp out expressions of anti-Semitism; to coordinate such efforts with other organizations and agencies; and to share information and best practices to increase effectiveness. It is the responsibility of this body to hold accountable those nations that do not fulfill their commitments to combat anti-Semitism and protect the rights of Jews and Jewish communities.

The World Jewish Congress stands ready to partner with the various bodies of the OSCE to accomplish these tasks. The Jewish communities of the world will work to hold nations

accountable. It is in the interest of all NGO's at this conference to struggle together to fight anti-Semitism, xenophobia and racism.

Last year the OSCE declared that "International developments or political issues, including those in Israel or elsewhere in the Middle East, never justify anti-Semitism." This year I hope OSCE will take the further steps needed to hold nations accountable.

Thank you.