



United States Mission to the OSCE

OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism

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Workshop on Promoting Tolerance: Media, i.a. Internet, NGOs and Religious Leaders
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Thank you, Mr. Moderator.

On behalf of the United States of America, I want to thank the organizers of this conference and the entire Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe for holding this important conference. I had the privilege of working on the White House staff of President Bush for almost three years and I can personally attest that the stated goal of this conference – combating Anti-Semitism – ranks very high in his panoply of values. Indeed, it is one of the founding principles of our nation that all people are created equal, and that a civil society based on the rule of law should treat all individuals the same regardless of race, color, religion, ethnic identity, or parentage.

The subject of my intervention today is the promotion of tolerance, especially with respect to the role of the media, non-governmental institutions, and religious leaders. Suffice it to say that if we could be successful in the goal of promoting genuine tolerance of Jews throughout the OSCE nations by each of these important components of society, we might find the work of this Conference completed. Unfortunately, while this important Conference has laid out the great challenge that faces us, and has, through the consensus of all fifty-five member nations, pointed us all in the right direction, there is much more work to be done.

In order to promote tolerance, the first step we must take is to understand the sources of intolerance. With respect to anti-Semitism, there has been much debate over many years about its origins. There are, to be sure, different strands of anti-Semitism. In my view, however, there are three principle forms: There is classical religiously based anti-Semitism, which has its roots in the ancient, and now largely abandoned claim of Deicide. There is also the anti-Semitism that grew out of the Enlightenment, in which Jews were alleged to be racially inferior. And more recently, there has been an upsurge in anti-Semitism, which appear to be motivated by events in Israel and elsewhere in the Middle East.

If we are serious about promoting tolerance of Jews, and ensuring that Jews feel comfortable living Jewish lives and expressing themselves as Jews in all of the nations of the OSCE, then our first challenge is to know how to recognize anti-Semitism when we see it. The first, and most clear marker of anti-Semitism is physical violence against Jews and Jewish property. According to data collected by the ADL, there has been a significant increase in such anti-Semitic incidents in the last few years. Indeed, in the last three months alone, we have witnessed in North America, Asia, and across Europe the desecration of Holocaust memorials and Jewish cemeteries, the vandalism of synagogues, attacks on school buses used to transport children to a Jewish school, and even physical attacks on Jewish teenagers by hoodlums shouting anti-Semitic epithets. All governments owe a duty of safety and security to those who live within their

borders. And in democratic societies, the protection of minorities is one of our most precious responsibilities, lest the moral authority we derive as democratic nations be undermined.

The second clear marker of anti-Semitism is when the media or NGOs, or anyone else in the international community, holds out Jews or Israel for singular treatment based on a non-uniform standard. Let me be very clear that individual Jews, as well as Israel, are not, and should not, be exempt from criticism, even serious criticism, when it is warranted. And it would be wrong for anyone to suggest that criticism of Israeli policies is by definition anti-Semitic any more than to suggest that criticism of U.S. policies is anti-American. Indeed, to its credit Israel, which is a vibrant democracy, has a vigorous press that is often one of the fiercest critics of the Israeli government. However, we must also take great care to make sure that we do not evaluate the conduct of any one country by standards that we would not welcome to be used to evaluate our own nation's conduct. Likewise, it would also be irresponsible for anyone to suggest that attacks on Israel or on supporters of Israel are never anti-Semitic. For example, in some universities, there have been calls for ending financial support to Israeli researchers, and some Israeli scholars were forced off the board of an international journal this past spring.

The fundamental premise of societies, that, like the United States, are based on the rule of law, is that we believe in clear and predictable rules and standards. When certain groups, especially minorities, are subject to treatment based on different sets of rules than the majority population, it is a recipe for discrimination. We have learned through our own experience in the United States of the great harm that is caused by the spread of the virus of bigotry and racism. As we work together to combat the virus of anti-Semitism around the world, we must take great care, as nations and as member of the media, religious communities, and NGOs, to avoid using double standards to measure the conduct of others.

Once we have identified anti-Semitism, what should be done to eradicate it, or at the very least, to combat it and promote greater tolerance? The first and most important step is for governments to be absolutely intolerant of acts of violence against Jews and Jewish institutions, and to take prompt action to punish the perpetrators of such acts. Here, I believe that the OSCE deserves much credit. Most of the members of the OSCE have made great strides over the past few years in cracking down officially on acts of violence or intimidation against Jews. And while we have clearly not stopped such acts of anti-Semitism, it is exceedingly important that they are not occurring with any government sanction.

The second step, and here the media, the NGO community, and religious leaders have an important role to play, is to make sure there is public exposure of any overt double standard related to the treatment of Jews. To combat such a double standard, we need to promote programs of education at all levels so that in all of the nations of the OSCE, no one will be ignorant either of the problem of anti-Semitism or of the dangers of this virus.

The formal Decision adopted by the OSCE Permanent Council in advance of this Conference “Reaffirm[s] the participating States’ existing commitments related to combating anti-Semitism” and Promote[s]...educational programmes for combating anti-Semitism” and “Combat hate crimes, which can be fueled by racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic propaganda in the media and on the Internet.” These are important steps that will re-dedicate all of our nations toward making progress in eradicating the virus of anti-Semitism before it is too late.