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United States Mission to the OSCE

Session 2: Combating Anti-Semitism

As prepared for delivery by Special Representative Farah Pandith
to the OSCE High-Level Conference on
Tolerance and non-Discrimination
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Mr. Chairman,

The United States places great importance on combating anti-Semitism and all forms of discrimination around the world. I have the privilege to serve as the Special Representative to Muslim Communities. I am also pleased that my colleague Hannah Rosenthal, the United States Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, is with us today here in Astana. Our presence here demonstrates that President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton are committed to fighting anti-Semitism and all forms of intolerance worldwide.

In her seven months in this position, Special Envoy Rosenthal has traveled widely in the United States and internationally. On these trips, she regularly meets with government officials, NGO representatives, and academic leaders, as well as with local Jewish communities and interfaith groups. The issue she hears raised again and again is that 2009 saw a dramatic increase in anti-Semitism internationally. This has been documented in the Department of State's Human Rights Reports.

In addition to an increased number of violent attacks against Jews and synagogues in Europe and elsewhere, 2009 saw growing incidents of harassment of Jewish children in their schools; desecration of Jewish institutions; and increasingly violent and virulent rhetoric in graffiti, as well as in various media. In recent weeks, we have seen legitimate criticism of Israeli government policies cross the line into anti-Semitism. Natan Sharansky teaches us that anti-Israel sentiment crosses the line into anti-Semitism if Israel is demonized, delegitimized or held to a different standard than any other country.

2009 has also seen the pervasiveness of wildly anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. This includes irrational Holocaust denial, actually denying the historical reality. This includes Holocaust glorification, in which community leaders ask God to be able to “finish the job” of the Holocaust. This includes Holocaust relativism, where the genocide that was the Holocaust -- the systematic extermination of the Jewish people -- is minimized by being equated with large-scale acts of political violence, including decades of repression.

The United States supports international organizations like the OSCE and the International Task Force on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research and in order to promote Holocaust awareness and remembrance as a tool of teaching tolerance and understanding for the next generation and so that countries can understand their role and responsibility during the Holocaust.

Anti-Semitic messages still abound in the media and on the Internet. Despite these problems, freedom of expression is a human right for which we must maintain our respect and commitment -- in fact, the United States believes that it is through permitting the free flow of expression and ideas that good speech can prevail over bad. The response to anti-Semitic speech and other forms of intolerant speech must therefore, include speech to counter such views, and while fully protecting freedom of expression, encompass a better understanding of and strategy to address the potential of various forms of media to incite violence. And when hate speech is identified, we must all strongly condemn it, calling on governments, to join together in condemning shameful, historically absurd and offensive speech.

As we in the OSCE refocus our attention on commitments made at prior meetings, steps must be taken to guard against indifference to injustice, no matter who is the victim. We must strive to ensure Muslims in the OSCE region are not marginalized, stereotyped or discriminated against. Discriminatory religion laws with onerous registration requirements repress peaceful religious belief. This is particularly true when a legal structure with multi-tiered layers of qualification metes out privileges and rights for majority faiths in a country, with the effect being to eclipse and restrict minority religious groups.

Stereotypes and prejudice towards Jewish communities persist around the world, which is why we must ensure continued support for the OSCE's anti-Semitism initiatives. In one OSCE participating State Hannah recently visited, a government official she met with actually gave credence to a modern version of the medieval anti-Semitic blood libel lie, discussing an accusation that Jews kidnapped children to steal their organs. Through the work of this conference and the ongoing efforts of OSCE participating States and non-governmental organizations we will continue to monitor and combat anti-Semitism and all forms of intolerance and discrimination.

We must work together to ensure that all participating States implement OSCE commitments on human rights and fundamental freedoms -- freedom of association, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and freedom of religion -- as these are at the heart of our efforts to promote more tolerant,

pluralistic societies. My colleagues on the U.S. delegation and I look forward to working together with all of you in the future to advance these important goals.

Jews cannot fight anti-Semitism alone. Muslims cannot fight Islamophobia alone. Roma cannot fight – alone. The LGBT community cannot fight – alone. And the list goes on. Hate is hate, but we can overcome it together.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.