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Session 3 Intervention

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I am Robert Meth, Chairman of NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia. NCSJ has participated in the Helsinki process for more than 20 years. The Helsinki Accords empowered human rights activists in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to challenge tyranny. Today the OSCE is a vital resource for human rights.

That is why I am pleased to offer this intervention in this session focusing on the role of governments in responding to anti-Semitic and hate motivated crimes, a dimension in which NCSJ has worked closely with parliamentarians, officials and organizations in the United States, Europe and the former Soviet Union.

As an umbrella organization that includes nearly 50 national American Jewish organizations and over 300 local community groups, including a number of those participating here, NCSJ would like to associate itself with the interventions of those partner organizations.

Anti-Semitism remains a significant problem throughout the successor states and across Europe. However, much of the support for advancing the fight against anti-Semitism has come from the governments of formerly communist nations, who see fighting anti-Semitism connected to their transition from the Soviet shadow.

I would like to focus on a few examples of steps already taken across the former Soviet Union to combat anti-Semitism and spur the development of more tolerant societies.

For example, two international conferences were held in Kazakhstan which attracted heads of state and other officials, and religious and ethnic leaders from across Europe, Asia, and the Middle East-prominent and credible representatives of Judaism and diverse streams of Christianity and Islam. With the involvement of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, these public events generated publicity as well as joint declarations against terrorism and religious extremism, and in support of tolerance and inter-ethnic understanding and cooperation.

In Russia, even as popular anti-Semitism continues to ride the surface of public discourse, new efforts are constantly leaving their mark and testing the waters for broader application. Some examples are funded from overseas, others initiated by the Jewish community, and some sponsored by local authorities.

Project KOLOT: Women's Voices was organized by NCSJ in partnership with Jewish Women International, Project Keshet, and the Russian Jewish Congress. Initiated with a grant from the U.S. State Department, this 18-month project engaged ethnic and religious communities in addressing the issue of domestic violence in Russia, and created an advocacy model for training religious communities to participate in civil society.

Working in Tula and Voronezh, we brought together police, city officials, the legal community, women's groups, human rights organizations, and academia to address a serious social problem. This collaboration generated a new working relationship between the ethnic and religious communities and the police and other city officials, opened police protocols to public oversight, and produced informational leaflets, bilingual training manuals, and a one-day conference with officials and activists that was the first-ever public discussion of a social issue between the local government, the police and the Voronezh and Tula Jewish communities.

The "Climate of Trust" program, an ambitious "citizen-level" program of the Bay Area Council for Jewish Rescue and Renewal, promotes ethnic and religious tolerance through U.S.-Russian exchanges among law enforcement and local officials, community leaders, activists, and educators. Components include a tolerance seminar for Russian participants, joint workshops in San Francisco and Russia, and a week-long reunion and review. As a result of this program, Regional Tolerance Centers have been established in three of Russia's seven Federal Districts; media seminar on police-community relations was held in Kazan for Internal Affairs Ministry (MVD) officials from across Russia; hate-crimes manuals are required reading for all police departments in the Republic of Karelia; and related teacher and police cadet-training programs were conducted in several regions.

In Ukraine, the new government has spoken out forcefully against anti-Semitism, re-enforced by President Yushchenko in our recent meetings in Washington. The Ukrainian government has been actively enforcing a law against incitement of inter-ethnic hatred. The President's Council of National Minorities also serves as an official conduit for input from religious and ethnic

minorities. Despite these important moves more action to battle Anti-Semitism is required. If the newly elected government is truly committed to liberalism and democracy then it must expunge the ugly traces of Anti-Semitism from within its own ranks.

Furthermore, more action needs to be undertaken to support the Jewish population in Ukraine. Out of the two hundred and forty Jewish communities only forty have their own synagogues. Moreover, some of the older synagogues and cemeteries, places of substantial historical importance, are in decay due to insufficient funding from the government. Fortunately, such funding is available through private funds and organizations. These organizations also play an important role through their various publications. The Institute for Jewish Studies, in Kyiv, promotes a range of programs as well as monitoring and reporting on anti-Semitism in the media and society. The Kyiv office of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress issues an annual report on "The Basic Tendencies of Anti-Semitism in the CIS States," with substantive submissions from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, and Armenia. Whether or not governments are able to produce such reports on their own, such publications by independent non-governmental bodies play a vital role in promoting awareness and providing a diversity of views.

Unfortunately, these beneficial periodicals are not the only ones being written in Ukraine. Over the last four years the number of Anti-Semitic publications has grown steadily and rapidly. Most of them are initiated by MAUP, the Interregional Academy of Personnel Management, one of the largest private Universities in Ukraine. Starting in the spring of 2002 MAUP and its president Georgy Schokin unleashed aggressive Anti-Semitic propaganda through a series of books, articles, brochures, and sponsored conferences. Among this influx of anti-Semitic propaganda was a book by Vasyl Yaremenko, a Professor at MAUP, claiming that there were 400,000 Jewish SS officers during the Holocaust. Furthermore, in a recent conference entitled "Zionism as the biggest threat to modern civilization", MAUP came up with a resolution calling for the deportation of Jews from Ukraine. The conference was sponsored by MAUP as an "academic event" and presided over by David Duke, an American White Supremacist. The influence of MAUP in the academic, economic and political sphere of Ukraine, the high level of education possessed by the leaders of this establishment, and the ferocity of their Anti-Semitic campaign are all reasons for serious concern.

The Association of Churches and Religious Organizations of Ukraine incorporates 18 faiths, including Judaism, Islam, Catholicism, and the Orthodox

Church. The agenda at one of the Association's meeting, focused on fighting HIV/AIDS, rehabilitating prisoners, and Ukrainian Mufti Sheikh Ahmed Tamim's call for a joint statement condemning terrorism. Rabbi Yakov Bleich, Chief Rabbi of Ukraine, hopes the Association's work can frustrate those seeking religious justification for their terrorist acts. The Association is also identifying common ground on such complicated issues as a new draft religion law and the restitution of communal and religious properties.

One of Rabbi Bleich's partners in these endeavors is His Beatitude Lubomyr Huzar, Patriarch of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. When the Patriarch visited Washington recently, he sought our advice and assistance in fighting anti-Semitism, promoting better awareness of Jewish concerns, and using education to promote tolerance among Ukrainian Greek Catholics and others. "We have to live as real neighbors," he stressed. "This is so important for the Church," he said, because Soviet strategy sought to alienate groups from each other, by planting lies and reinforcing stereotypes. He sees anti-Semitism as part of the same Soviet approach that kept down his own church for so many decades.

Many leaders in the successor states speak out regularly against anti-Semitism, which is an important first step. Enacting and implementing laws institutionalizes the positive rhetoric and perpetuates freedom. Unfortunately, implementation of these laws is not consistent. Dismissing hate crimes and anti-Semitism as hooliganism or random violence does not advance the fight against these crimes.

The OSCE, in its effort to fight the use and proliferation of global Anti-Semitism, can provide useful models to its member agencies through ODIHR and the special representative on Anti-Semitism. NCSJ and its member agencies will continue to work with the OSCE to combat the unfortunate rise of global anti-Semitism. This recent trend is a bi-product of the fear and insecurity felt by individuals in a rapidly globalizing and advancing world. Only through a joint effort to provide the public with reliable and reassuring information can the threat of anti-Semitism be alleviated.