

OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism
Berlin, 28-29 April 2004

ENGLISH only

**Address by Paul-Eerik Rummo, Minister of Population and Ethnic
Affairs of Republic of Estonia**

Mr. Chairman/ Madame Chairperson

Distinguished Guests,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are gathered here to reflect on reasons why almost sixty years after the end of the 2nd World War,

Sixty years after the horrific acts of violence against Jewish people took place in the course of that war,

And a few days before opening a new chapter in the history of Europe,

The situation in the World and in Europe is such that we still have to think of ways to change attitudes towards Jewish community.

This thought is troubling on one hand, but on the other hand the fact that we have gathered here to reflect on what we can do to advance the understanding, acceptance and tolerance is encouraging.

All of us know that the Holocaust is not merely a tragedy in the past but a much darker manifestation of a deep fault in human mind, which at the bleakest moment in history was given an opportunity to surface. As such it still constitutes a real threat that keeps haunting us even today.

As long as we are content with solving problems stemming from hatred rather than concentrating our efforts towards prevention by advocating understanding, we are doomed to only very limited success.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The aim of this session is to focus on Governments' role in combating anti-Semitism. Therefore, please allow me to give you a brief overview of the steps that the Government of Estonia has taken in the last years and is undertaking today.

Of these steps, I happen to attach paramount importance to the restitution of nationalized property to members of Jewish community after the Soviet occupation of Estonia ended in 1991. The restitution was quick, willing and complete. It also laid a good foundation for further steps for addressing issues that were earlier either considered taboo or veiled in myths.

In order to establish the truth concerning the past, it was decided in Estonia to establish with the help of outstanding international experts, what was the extent of Holocaust, as well as other crimes against humanity in Estonia.

To this end President Lennart Meri called to life the International Commission for Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity on October 2nd, 1998.

The first task of the Commission consisting of seven international experts, and chaired by a veteran diplomat and statesman Mr. Max Jacobson, was to

study the crimes committed in Estonia during the time of German occupation in 1941 through 1944 in order to ascertain the individual perpetrators.

In the study concerning the period of German occupation the Commission found convincing evidence of crimes against humanity, among those directed against Estonian citizens of Jewish descent. While the Commission recognized that Estonia and Estonians were a nation victimized in the 2nd World War, the report also stresses individual culpability and points out that no criminal should be able to shelter behind a cloak of victim-hood.

Other important steps taken by the Government of Estonia include introducing a Holocaust victims' remembrance day in January of 2003 and supplying Estonian schools with educational materials pertaining to the Holocaust. The Government's focus is on educating the educators — teachers and professors by means of compiling a best practice handbook, organizing forums and seminars. These tools are further developed and new materials introduced in time to make each annual Holocaust victims' remembrance day on January 27 a step towards better understanding.

Although, such an approach takes time before it yields any demonstrable results, I am sure that only diligent work such as this can effect a change in mentality.

A free and open society fosters fair exchange of ideas among other means through the use of mass media. Indeed, without free and independent media the very idea of modern democracy is put in danger. It must be born in mind

however, that any freedom, including the freedom of speech, brings with itself responsibility. With the proliferation of new medias, particular attention must be given to the fact, that anonymous expression of opinion does not revoke liability. Therefore law enforcement agencies must stay vigilant against abuses in this respect.

The Government on its part will have to make sure that the training of law enforcement officers enables them to understand the sensitivities and teaches them how to counter manifestations of anti-Semitism, xenophobia, racism and intolerance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe in humankind. Human being has the ability to learn from the lessons of the past and the unlimited desire to develop. Being human means also responsibility. Therefore, there can be no safe haven for those who commit such heinous crimes as addressed at this Conference. The memory of Holocaust victims should teach us to be weary of violence. If we can learn that, then the future generations may see our work here as a tribute to those, who perished.

With that I would like to conclude my brief remarks,
Thank you for your attention.