

The Ongoing Struggle Against Anti-Semitism

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

It has been six years since the OSCE's historic first conference on anti-Semitism in Vienna. That event marked a turning point in the international community's willingness to vigorously address the world's oldest social illness. The Vienna gathering, followed by one in Berlin in 2004, in Cordoba in 2005, and in Bucharest in 2007, as well as the International Conference Against Anti-Semitism convened by Great Britain's House of Commons this year, have demonstrated a seriousness of purpose and provided a basis for optimism.

But while the important progress that these conferences have represented should be acknowledged and appreciated, and while these meetings have come to represent a real source of hope, recent events have unfortunately reminded us that much work remains to be done. Since Israel conducted a defensive military operation in Gaza last winter, a discernible increase in anti-Semitism has resulted. In many parts of the OSCE region, anti-Semitic attitudes, as well as violent incidents, have increased. Criticism of Israel often has featured anti-Semitic and dreaded Nazi motifs and imagery.

Given the clear need to intensify the spotlight on anti-Semitism as a distinct and uniquely resilient phenomenon and to redouble our efforts to combat it, the Ministerial Council should formalize the scheduling of conferences on anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance at regular intervals. Moreover, to maximize the practical impact of such gatherings and amplify their positive message, we must diligently implement relevant programs of action – in education, legislation, and law enforcement.

Whereas four high-level conferences on anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance took place between 2003 and 2007, a successor conference is now overdue. The government of Kazakhstan has advanced the idea of a high-level conference on intolerance that would take place during the 2010 Kazakh Chairmanship. B'nai B'rith gladly welcomes this important proposal and calls on the OSCE to convene such a gathering next year. The 2010 conference should include a discrete section dedicated to anti-Semitism, as did previous high-level conferences, and should review practical areas such as data collection, legislation, and the role of law enforcement officials.

B'nai B'rith also calls on the OSCE to convene a Supplemental Human Dimension Meeting on anti-Semitism in early 2010. The need for an expert-level meeting on this topic has become increasingly apparent in recent months as representatives of governments and NGOs alike continue their urgent and difficult work in this area.

Meanwhile, we should further promote, within the OSCE, the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency's working definition of anti-Semitism, and provide for the utilization of that FRA standard in monitoring efforts. This working definition should gain greater usage not just by researchers and law enforcement officials, but by educators, journalists, and human rights advocates, as well.

We must bolster the funding for ODIHR's tolerance-related staffing and programs, so that ODIHR's Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department, including its expert on anti-Semitism, can further expand its critical work. Areas such as educational activities and the training of law enforcement officials to combat hate crimes are examples of programs for which the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department deserves great praise. In a similar vein, OSCE member states must fulfill their reporting requirements with regard to combating anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. For too long, many governments have been remiss in this area.

We must extend, for the foreseeable future, the terms of the OSCE Chair-in-Office's personal representatives on intolerance, who direct sustained attention, at the highest level, to the problems of anti-Semitism and other forms of bigotry. We must also support conditions that would facilitate rather than hinder the work of the personal representatives and enable them to perform their functions to the best of their respective abilities.

Our actions must be informed by a keen understanding of the specialized origins and manifestations of anti-Semitism, even as we continue to deplore and take firm steps to address intolerance in its many forms.

Finally, we must strongly reiterate and proactively reinforce the crucial principle declared at the 2004 Berlin conference and reiterated at the 2005 Cordoba conference and the 2007 Bucharest conference: that no political position, cause or grievance can ever justify anti-Semitism. We must further make clear, once and for all, that the de-legitimization and demonization of Israel is often none other than poorly disguised anti-Semitism, while denial of the Jewish right to self-determination – to peace and security for Jews in their homeland – is anti-Semitism in unambiguous form. And to employ terrorism and to intimidate and incite against Jews – in schoolbooks, sermons, television broadcasts, print publications, or Internet materials – is most certainly and undeniably anti-Semitism. Nowhere in the OSCE region can we afford to minimize or rationalize hatred and criminality. The cost of our indifference would simply be too high.

Thank you for your commitment and your leadership.