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Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

**STATEMENT BY MR. FRANZ VON DÄNIKEN,
STATE SECRETARY OF SWITZERLAND,
AT THE SECOND OSCE CONFERENCE ON ANTI-SEMITISM**

Berlin, 28–29 April 2004

Mr. Chairman,

We have gathered here in Berlin in order to send an important signal. Together with our Jewish fellow citizens, we are alarmed at the anti-Semitic incidents taking place in the OSCE area. Unfortunately, we must face the fact that Jewish people are again frequently becoming the target of disparaging anti-Semitic treatment. The primary objective of this Conference must be to condemn publicly and categorically every form of racism and anti-Semitism. We should like to express our gratitude to our German hosts for providing the OSCE States and the non-governmental organizations represented here with a further opportunity, following the Vienna conference, to share their experiences in combating anti-Semitism.

Governments are the primary guarantors of a pluralistic society, with the responsibility for taking a stand against racism and anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitic actions not only endanger Jewish men and women, but they also violate fundamental values that provide the basis for peaceful coexistence.

There is no easy way to deal with the evil of anti-Semitism. The Swiss experience in incorporating measures against anti-Semitism in the comprehensive effort to combat every form of racism and xenophobia has been a positive one.

For example, Swiss criminal laws dealing with racism make both discrimination on religious grounds as well as the denial of an act of genocide a punishable offence. In this way, the criminal law provides legal means to support the combating of anti-Semitism. Since the introduction in 1995 of the criminal provisions dealing with racism, at least a third of all court decisions handed down have involved anti-Semitic incidents or the denial of the Holocaust. Since 2001 there have been fewer such rulings. Whether this positive development will continue is an open question. However, we believe that the preventive measures adopted in Switzerland are working and are contributing to a steady decline in the number of anti-Semitic or racially motivated incidents.

Since 1995, the Federal Commission against Racism, an independent body established by the Government, has been dealing with the problem of racial discrimination. The aim of the Commission, in which members of the Jewish community are represented along with

spokesmen of other minorities, is to promote better understanding between persons of different national or ethnic origin or religious affiliation. The Commission advises the Swiss authorities, and in 1998 it published a much-discussed report on “Anti-Semitism in Switzerland”, which contained numerous recommendations. In a statement, the Government committed itself to resolutely continuing the fight against anti-Semitism.

In 2002, the *Bundesrat* (Federal Council) established the Office for Combating Racism. This Office also administers a fund, to which the *Bundesrat* has allocated 15 million Swiss francs or approximately 10 million euros for the period from 2001 to 2005. This fund is used to support measures to develop an awareness of every form of racism. These include preventive measures as well. Numerous projects deal explicitly with anti-Semitism and emphasize the education sphere. An active rejection of racism and anti-Semitism must be inculcated in schools, through words and deeds, beginning with the youngest children.

Mention might also be made of the fact that Switzerland has introduced, following an initiative of the Council of Europe, a Holocaust Memorial Day in the country’s schools. This memorial day was observed for the first time during this year, on 27 January, a date with great symbolic resonance in the history of Europe, marking as it does the day on which the extermination camp at Auschwitz was liberated. At the heart of the observance of the Holocaust Memorial Day are educational activities prepared independently by schools and teaching staff. Teaching materials were made available for use by the schools.

Mr. Chairman,

Switzerland’s Jewish community has deep roots in Swiss culture and society. That community, as one of the many minorities in Switzerland, has developed a particular sensitivity for tolerance and non-discrimination. This can also be seen in its particular commitment, displayed in many different ways, to promoting the integration and non-discrimination of newly arrived minorities, whether they be immigrants or refugees.

The fight against anti-Semitism is part of our efforts to counter every form of intolerance, discrimination, racism and xenophobia. These efforts do not stop at national borders and have today become a common task facing the international community. The OSCE was quick to recognize this. In recent years, it has stepped up its activities to promote tolerance and non-discrimination. It is up to us to ensure that this commitment is maintained.