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Permanent Delegation of the Republic of Belarus to the OSCE

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR VIKTAR GAISENAK,
HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS, AT
THE OSCE CONFERENCE ON ANTI-SEMITISM**

Berlin, 28–29 April 2004

Mr. Chairman,

The delegation of the Republic of Belarus notes the importance of holding today's Conference on Anti-Semitism under the auspices of the OSCE. We regard this Conference as a substantial contribution to the efforts of the Organization's participating States to counter racism, discrimination and intolerance.

We believe that specific and resolute actions on the part of the OSCE participating States to eradicate this evil represent a logical extension of earlier conferences and decisions already adopted, including the decision of the OSCE Permanent Council of 22 April 2004 on combating anti-Semitism.

Jews have been living on the territory of Belarus for more than six centuries; they are an integral part of the ethnic composition of Belarusian society and have been fully integrated into the life of that society. For several centuries in the past, Belarus was one of the centres of Jewish civilization.

According to various sources, there are at present between 30,000 and 60,000 Jews living in Belarus. A total of 47 Jewish national cultural organizations and three Jewish religious associations comprising 43 religious communities have been registered and are actively operating with the support of the State agencies of Belarus.

Belarus is characterized by an absence of any significant inter-faith and inter-ethnic conflicts or problems. The Jewish population, like other ethnic minorities in Belarus, is treated with respect and benevolence at all levels (State, public and personal).

Nevertheless, although few in number, cases of anti-Semitism are a source of deep concern and disquiet to us. As part of their categorical condemnation of any manifestation of anti-Semitism, xenophobia, intolerance or racism in general, the Belarusian Government and competent law-enforcement agencies are making systematic efforts to investigate all such cases and to bring criminal charges against the organizers and perpetrators. The laws of the Republic of Belarus make it possible and necessary to wage an uncompromising fight against all manifestations of anti-Semitism as a particular form of racism.

In the field of education, we are also taking the necessary measures to increase awareness, particularly among the young generation, of the seriousness of the problem of anti-Semitism and also to help to promote Jewish culture and education.

Mr. Chairman,

The problem of anti-Semitism cannot be solved at the national level unless our actions to this end are co-ordinated at the international level. Today, virtually open borders exist between all European countries. A rise in anti-Semitism, racism or xenophobia in one country or group of countries spreads like a cancerous growth throughout all of Europe. In a number of cases, the Internet and other media are creating a favourable breeding ground for this phenomenon. It is our duty to counter this expansion.

With that in mind, we are somewhat concerned as regards the consolidation of efforts to this end at the international level.

At the 60th meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Belarus and the Russian Federation proposed a resolution drawing the international community's attention to the problem of the resurgence and spread of neo-Nazism, neofascism and aggressive nationalism, which serve as a breeding ground for anti-Semitism as well.

The resolution was adopted with the support of the majority of the members of the Commission. To our surprise, European Union countries, the United States of America and Japan voted against the resolution. What is the conclusion to be drawn from this by neo-Nazi and neofascist elements and the other such scum against whom this resolution was directed?

In conclusion, we should like to reiterate that the problem of anti-Semitism remains a challenge to the entire civilized world. If it is to be effectively countered, we need not only joint actions by the governments and civil society of the participating States but also the pooling and co-ordination of efforts at the international level.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.