

## **Combating Anti-Semitism in the OSCE Region**

**Eric Fusfield**  
**B'nai B'rith International**  
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Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates:

Of all the hatreds that tear at our social fabric today, none is more unremitting, more resilient, more adaptable than anti-Semitism. As representatives of B'nai B'rith International, an American-based organization with members in dozens of countries around the world, my colleagues and I have viewed the resurgence of anti-Semitism throughout the OSCE region in recent years with deep anguish. The responsibility of governments, international organizations, and leaders of society to confront this phenomenon is becoming increasingly urgent.

To do this we need practical tools. One such mechanism is ODIHR's Words into Action project, which counters anti-Semitism through activities in the areas of education, security, and coalition-building. The German government, which has funded this program for the past two years, deserves much credit for its support of this vital initiative. Words into Action has published practical guides and provided other resources to assist educators, government officials, and civil society in better understanding and developing strategies to combat anti-Semitism.

It is crucial that this work continue, as the need is more pressing than ever. B'nai B'rith calls on the OSCE to continue its support of Words into Action and insists that it not downgrade the project or diminish its specific focus on anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is a unique, and uniquely persistent, social phenomenon, with distinct characteristics and distinct prescriptions for countering it. Now is simply not the time to reverse course on this important effort.

In 2014 we honored the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the OSCE Berlin Conference on Anti-Semitism and the historic declaration that emerged from that gathering. But the review conference that took place in Berlin that fall underscored that much work remains to be done. The past four years have seen a wave of anti-Israel demonstrations throughout the OSCE region; these gatherings have typically featured blatantly anti-Semitic themes and have often turned violent. Attacks and threats against Jewish individuals and institutions, such as the white supremacist march last year in Charlottesville, Virginia have increased in frequency and intensity, as the landscape from Belgium to Bulgaria, Germany to Greece, Holland to Hungary, and Ireland to Italy has witnessed violence against Jewish targets. This spread of hatred has been accompanied by a corrosion of the public discourse with respect to Jews and Israel and has left Jews both in Europe and North America fearful for their safety and security.

As a result of anti-Semitic attacks, thousands of Jews have emigrated from Western Europe to Israel in each of the past several years. Furthermore, a survey of European Jewish leaders last year indicated that membership and participation in Jewish institutions has declined,

at the same time that security has, of necessity, been increased. Next Tuesday night the holy day of Yom Kippur, the Jewish day of atonement, will begin. Across the continent, synagogue attendance is expected to suffer as a result of fear about openly practicing Judaism.

The rise of anti-Jewish hatred has also resulted in a proliferation of anti-Semitic propaganda, much of which is directed against the State of Israel. Tragically, the demonization and delegitimization of the Jewish state has become a daily occurrence, as Israel's enemies repeatedly accuse it of being a Nazi-like occupier and an apartheid state that disenfranchises the Palestinians. Falsehoods about Israel are repeated so often that they become widely accepted in the popular culture and sometimes impact government policy. The effort by Israel's relentless critics to denigrate the Jewish state is not only evidence that anti-Semitism is alive and well 73 years after the Holocaust – this new variation of the world's oldest social illness actually poses a security threat to the Jewish state by intensifying its international isolation.

For more than a decade, the OSCE has taken up the urgent struggle against rising anti-Semitism. High-level conferences in Vienna in 2003 and Berlin in 2004 and 2014, among other gatherings, have focused a needed spotlight on this and other forms of intolerance.

The historic 2004 Berlin Declaration, which provided a series of important recommendations for governments to follow in combating anti-Semitism, specifically addressed the growing problem of anti-Semitic attacks being committed by opponents of Israel's policies. The passage stating that "international developments or political issues, including those in Israel or elsewhere in the Middle East, never justify anti-Semitism" stands as an important rebuff to those who try to justify hate crimes with politics.

Permanent Council Decision No. 607, which preceded the 2004 Berlin Conference, and subsequent Ministerial decisions, represent vital affirmations of the OSCE's commitment to fight anti-Semitism and related forms of racism and xenophobia. That pact has been bolstered by the creation of ODIHR's indispensable tolerance and non-discrimination unit, which carries out this important work each day and which includes an expert advisor on anti-Semitism, and by the appointment of the Chairman-in-Office's three personal representatives on combating intolerance.

In 2016 the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) adopted a working definition of anti-Semitism that clearly illustrates the dimensions of the problem. The time has come for the OSCE to follow suit. The Ministerial Council should approve a working definition of anti-Semitism based on the IHRA model, one that should then be widely promoted within the OSCE to educate public officials, journalists, teachers, and others about the contemporary manifestations of anti-Semitism.

While much has been done to fight anti-Semitism in the past decade or more, much work remains. The need for practical and effective strategies to combat and defeat this pathology is still crucial. To this end,

- We must continue to affirm commitments made at the landmark 2004 conference and reiterated at subsequent conferences and assess the implementation of those commitments.
- We must enhance funding for ODIHR's Tolerance and Non-Discrimination unit, which has now become a fixed and integral part of the OSCE's work. We must enable the TND unit to sustain and expand its critical activities, which include the Words into Action project and educational programs on anti-Semitism in more than a dozen countries.
- We must extend, for the foreseeable future, the terms of the three personal representatives on intolerance.
- Member-states must fulfill their reporting requirements with respect to hate crimes data. Far too few governments have done so until now.
- Finally, we must strongly reinforce the crucial principle declared at the 2004 Berlin Conference – That no political position, cause or grievance can ever justify anti-Semitism – and make clear that the demonization and delegitimization of the Jewish state is often none other than a pretext for the hatred of Jews themselves.