



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony :: Betty Ehrenberg

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Congregations

We are witnessing a new, virulent, globalizing anti-Semitism that has been developing for years and that has manifestations in many countries today. It is almost indistinguishable from classic anti-Semitism yet there is a new aspect. As traditional anti-Semitism involved discrimination against Jews and the denial of their right to live as equal members of society, this new element involves the Middle East situation, the singling out of Israel for discriminatory treatment in international bodies, and includes public calls for the destruction of Israel and the Jewish people, even for the killing of Jews as religious obligation.

The breakthrough Conference on Anti-Semitism held in Berlin by of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe last April involved over one thousand participants focused on the roles of government and civil society in combating anti-Semitism. I was proud to serve as a Public Member of the U.S. delegation headed by former New York City mayor Ed Koch, Helsinki Commission Chairman Representative Chris Smith, Representative Ben Cardin and Ambassador Stephen Minikes. The Conference presented a challenge to our countries to shape our world in strengthening peace and justice. Anti-Semitism, if allowed to continue to spread, will affect the foundations of world democracies. What represented a significant diplomatic victory was the fact that governments expressed a willingness to acknowledge the severity of anti-Semitism in their countries and to take action to combat it. For too long, the attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions that have been increasing in the past three and a half years have either been denied, ignored, rationalized, or obfuscated. The Conference presented an opportunity for diagnosing and treating this terrible disease.

The Berlin Declaration was a groundbreaking example of countries willing to re-commit themselves to the principles of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Fifty-five member states pledged to take concrete steps to fight the anti-Semitism in their midst, highlighting the global danger that it presents in modern times. Today, the increase of terrorism, the development of weapons of mass destruction by state sponsors of terrorism added to the demonization of Jews and Israel is a combination of very volatile elements. In this light, the Berlin Declaration, unequivocally condemning all manifestations of anti-Semitism, is all the

more timely and significant. The acknowledgement by the international community that political developments, including those in Israel or elsewhere in the Middle East, never justify anti-Semitism render the demonization and delegitimization of Israel unacceptable. Singling out Israel for blame by the international community while ignoring the most deplorable human rights records of others is a double standard that cannot be allowed to exist.

The OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism took place in an atmosphere of cooperation, working towards a common goal of eradicating discrimination. The presence of Secretary of State Colin Powell demonstrated the determination of the United States to take the lead in reversing this alarming trend. Secretary Powell's clear message that hate crimes must be prosecuted and that it is unacceptable to vilify Israel by the use of Nazi symbols and racist caricatures set the guidelines.

The achievements of the Conference were unprecedented. Demonization of Israel was identified for what it is – anti-Semitism. For the first time, OSCE member states will commit to monitoring hate crimes, tracking bias crime statistics and issuing public reports. Best practices to help prevent anti-Semitism and racism would be shared. For once, the disease would be not only diagnosed, but treatments prescribed.

Ideas were exchanged, such as the formation of interfaith commissions to cooperate on issues of common concern. Examples of public educational programs on teaching tolerance and preventing incitement were cited. Attention was focused on educating young people; most important since hatred and incitement have been taught in many countries.

I serve as Director of International and Communal Relations for the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, the nation's largest Orthodox Jewish synagogue organization. Our constituency of hundreds of synagogues all across the country has made the need for protection of Jewish institutions from anti-Semitic attacks a top priority. We respond very strongly to reports of attacks on Jews and have met with representatives of Homeland Security and law enforcement agencies concerning threats to the Jewish community.

We undertake initiatives to help combat anti-Semitism, such as playing a key role in helping Congress pass resolution H.Res.393, calling on the United States government to condemn anti-Semitism and to hold European leaders accountable for the safety of their respective Jewish communities. This resolution, introduced by Congressman Joe Crowley (D-NY), was passed in December 2002, just as anti-Semitic acts were on the upsurge.

We meet continually with both Jewish and non-Jewish leaders of countries who are experiencing this surge of anti-Semitism. Recent meetings were held with Jewish and other

leaders of France, Turkey, and Morocco to support those Jewish communities in the wake of attacks and to urge their leaders to bring the perpetrators to justice. OU president Harvey Blitz attended the funerals of the victims of the bombing of the two synagogues in Turkey several months ago in solidarity with that community.

The Orthodox Union supports a Jewish school in Kharkov in the Ukraine known as the Joseph K. Miller Torah Academy and closely monitors events in Eastern Europe. We recently contacted representatives of Belarus to protest the desecration of Jewish cemeteries in Grodno and waged a grass-roots campaign to stop the destruction of Jewish graves.

We have been in contact with Argentinean representatives since 1992 regarding the terrorist bombings of the Israeli embassy and Jewish Community Center in Argentina, marking each anniversary in the press. As an NGO observer at the United Nations we strongly lobbied for the resolution condemning anti-Semitism that was proposed by the Irish delegation and for the inclusion of anti-Semitism in the resolution condemning racism. We work closely with the United States UN mission to oppose anti-Israel resolutions and those “special sessions” that punish Israel alone, giving anti-Semitism the appearance of international sanction.

The OU takes part in interfaith dialogue with other religious groups in order to help increase mutual understanding and to work on issues of common concern. We believe that these communities can form coalitions to avert crises and to further the interests of religious harmony and liberty.

Our current grass-roots initiative is an advocacy campaign for the passage of H.Con.Res.425, the resolution introduced by Representatives Smith and Cardin expressing the sense of the Congress in support of the ongoing work of the OSCE in combating anti-Semitism and its parallel resolution in the Senate, S.Con.Res.110, introduced by Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell, Commission Co-chairman. These resolutions will strengthen the work of the OSCE and help ensure that the elements of the Berlin Declaration will indeed be carried out. We recently applauded the passage of Senator George Voinovich’s bill, S.2292, and are looking forward to the passage of the its related House bill introduced by Representative Smith.

Thank you for your attention.