



**UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE
(U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)**

**Hearing on
RESPONDING TO HATE: THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS ACTORS**

**Tuesday, July 16, 2019
11:00 a.m.
Rayburn House Office Building
Room 2200**

**Opening Statement of Senator Ben Cardin
Ranking Member**

In recent years there has been an unfortunate rise in hate crimes not only in Europe but in the United States of America. We have seen a rise in anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim acts, and anti-migrant and anti-refugee sentiments. Addressing these issues have been my priority as Special Representative on Anti-Semitism, Racism, and Intolerance for the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. As Senator, my priority legislation efforts have always included civil rights and human rights.

Hate is unacceptable, and the safety of vulnerable communities is the utmost important. We must underline the importance of coalitions to ensure their protection because it is not only the most vulnerable in our societies whom are in danger when we fail to act, but the very foundations of our democracies. United, we are stronger. And when various stakeholders come together, we can build capacity within government and international institutions to effectively counter the rise in hate.

There are many things we can do collectively to make a difference, and a group we cannot do this without are our religious actors and interfaith institutions. The witnesses in this room today are on the frontlines of developing action plans to combat hate in their communities. Radia Bakkouch, President of Coexister, is with us today to offer her insights and experience in this field. I had the honor of meeting Radia and her colleagues in Paris in May. Radia's organization promotes diversity, social cohesion, and active coexistence – aimed at empowering minority communities and tackling intolerance in France and look forward to hearing her views on how we can share information and best practices between civil society organizations, government institutions, international organizations, and of course, in Congress alongside our other esteemed panelists.

Efforts in the U.S. Congress have focused on addressing hate in our societies, and numerous legislative initiatives have been introduced in the 116th Congress. I introduced a bill in 2017 to ban religious, racial and discriminatory profiling by law enforcement. I have also held hearings focused on combating anti-Semitism and racism. In fact, last week at the 28th Annual Session on the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Luxembourg, I hosted a U.S. side event entitled “Countering Hate: Lessons from the Past, Leadership for the Future” that addressed the rise in hate-based incidents we have been witnessing across the OSCE region and beyond.

We called for parliamentarians from across the 57 OSCE participating States to adopt an action plan to counter bias and discrimination and foster inclusion and discussed what we are doing in our own countries to address the problem of hate and intolerance. We heard from Dr. Rebecca Erbelding of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, who emphasized that we must not ignore early warning signs from the past which are rising to the surface in the present. Sadly, we are past early warning signs of hate-based incidents as evident from the recent tragedies from Pittsburgh and Colombo to Christchurch.

The collaborative spirit I witnessed at the OSCE PA hearing denote our efforts to work together and tackle this unacceptable problem. We have heard of successes from projects like the OSCE’s Words Into Action project to increase education on anti-Semitism and coalition building against hate from Michael Link, OSCE parliamentarian and former director of the OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), however, much remains to be done and a greater focus on deeds rather than words and what actions are needed to create a comprehensive effort between government institutions, criminal justice systems, civil society actors, and international organizations.

We are here today to hear from the witnesses in the room. They understand the very foundations of our democracies are in danger. I look forward to hearing their recommendations on how we all can collectively change some of the disturbing trends we are witnessing such as attacks on places of worship, to push back on ugly ideologies and actions, and find concrete ways to build safer communities who do not have to live in fear. I look forward to hearing how we can all work together to ensure the human rights and civil rights for all.

Thank you.