



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony :: Israel Singer

Chairman - World Jewish Congress

Congressman Smith, I want to thank you. Not for inviting me back here again, but for your leadership, your interest and your courage. You see the OSCE, but more importantly, the Helsinki process not for what many outside of the United States would have it be, but what you know it can be and we wish it would be. For that, we and people of good will the world over owe you our gratitude.

The limited success we had in Berlin was due mostly to the tremendous efforts of a few individuals. The German Foreign Minister's leadership in seizing the moment and forcibly putting together April's conference on anti-Semitism against the will of many showed once again that he is not only a true leader, but indeed a partner and a friend. His mission to expose a plague that has resurfaced and again threatens the safety of Europe's peoples and the integrity of its leaders succeeded and it succeeded because of his leadership and the dedication of the people in this room.

When I went to see Secretary of State Powell in March, I told him that his presence in Berlin was critical to the success of the conference, if not for the only reason that it would raise the level to one unseen at the OSCE in many years. He gave me his word and he kept it. There are those in the United States and around the world who would have preferred that Mr. Powell stay home, but he came. He came and he spoke out. He came and he spoke the truth.

From the labors of this commission, the Secretary, the Ambassadors and the members of the US delegation led by Mayor Koch - and I see several of the delegates here today - we achieved for the first time in our history a resolution, language adopted by 55 nations condemning anti-Semitism.

Language that says its not okay to beat Jews in the street. Language that says it is not okay to firebomb synagogues. Language that says its not okay to torment Jewish children on their way to school. Language that says its not okay to destroy a synagogue, deface a holy site or desecrate a grave. Anti-Semites hate Jews so much they are willing to even beat on those who Jews who are dead. An anti-Semite hates a Jew before he is born and long after he is dead.

For the first time in our history we have governments aggressively combating anti-Semitism. When I last sat here, I challenged this commission and Mr. Weisskeirchen specifically to take

this issue to parliament. I challenged you to take this issue of anti-Semitism and the need to condemn it, legislate against it and punish those who perpetrate its despicable acts, to positively act to put it to an end. I sit here today to say that we have met with mixed results. Many of your colleagues in parliaments around the world have answered this call. Shamefully many have not. I do not understand why. A body that cannot adopt a resolution condemning anti-Semitism is itself anti-Semitic. These are not my words, Edgar Bronfman wrote this in the Financial Times.

He wrote this in a call to arms against anti-Semitism. History has brought us to a day where the nations of the world will have to stand up and be counted. This September, before the United Nations General Assembly, there will be a resolution. This resolution is unlike any other ever proposed. It is a standalone resolution that condemns anti-Semitism. It does nothing else. It does not take sides in the Middle East conflict. It does not discuss the war on terror. It does not make reference to treaty violations or border disputes. It simply and clearly states that anti-Semitism is wrong.

If the nations of the world cannot stand up and be counted in opposition to anti-Semitism, then they are complicit in its spread and will have abandoned the tradition of human rights upon which the United Nations was founded and for which it professes to act. They will testify that the atmosphere in the United Nations is so corrupt and so poisoned with hatred that it cannot bring itself to condemn the world's oldest and most persistent form of racism.

To this I must thank Congressman Smith, Congressman Lantos and others for introducing legislation in the House that would call on this government to support and act on behalf of such a resolution. Your efforts to establish an office in the State Department to deal with the subject of anti-Semitism, catalogue occurrences and combat manifestations of it is surely to be lauded. Congressman Lantos, we have known each other for a very long time and you know better than anyone else who ever served in this chamber the horrible evils spawned by anti-Semitism. You saw its destruction first hand and you deserve to see the day when all the nations of the world vow to combat and destroy it.

Not long ago, I visited Senator Clinton and asked her to craft legislation in the Senate that deal with the subject of anti-Semitism. Since then, her office and mine have been in constant contact and I believe we are not far away from seeing that bill in the Senate. The most productive portion of our conversation was not the specific issues of how to legislate against anti-Semitism and encourage others to do the same, but rather the notion there is even more we can do to ensure that never again will Jews fear walking in the street.

So, with Senator Clinton as an inspiration and a partner, I come before you today to say that we can do more and we must do more. Legislating against hate crimes and anti-Semitism in particular serves to define the crime and punish offenders. But we must act today to make such laws unnecessary.

Who would have thought that after witnessing the horrors of the Holocaust, this generation would again be looking down the dark corridor of ethnic hatred and violence. We must embark

on an aggressive campaign to educate the public and educate our youth. We must teach them the dangers of hate and the consequences of conflict. We must teach them to resolve their differences with words, not molotov cocktails, knives, guns and bombs. We must avoid conflict by teaching mutual respect and tolerance.

Today, every child in this country if asked could clearly identify enemies of the United States but I dare say few would be able to point to a map and find an ally. This is not because we do not have any, but because combating foes has taken precedent over finding friends.

We do not need to approach this subject with glib naivety. The realities and perils of this world are not lost on anyone in this chamber. We all remember that horrible day in September. We all had family or friends who were there. We all read the newspapers, see the TV screens.

But those who believe that the only way to speak with the Muslim world is with the sword will find that to be the case, for they will be responsible for creating that reality. A generation ago, no one could have imagined that the Catholic Church and the Jewish people would not only find common ground, but work together in areas of social welfare, politics and morality. In just two weeks, I am chairing a meeting of the Jewish people and the Catholic Church. Cardinals, Chief Rabbis and clergy from around the world will gather in Buenos Aires to discuss the shared ideals of charity and justice.

We are meeting in Argentina because it was there, when most of the world had forgotten, when most of the world had turned its back, when even people in this country neglected and forgot its neighbor to the south, it was in Argentina that the Jewish people and the Catholic Church joined forces to feed the hungry, treat the sick and care for the poor, during that nations crippling and debilitating economic crisis. Thankfully the sea has changed for that country and people are once again slowly finding jobs, but the lessons learned are many and great. For the first time in a two thousand year history Jewish and Christians worked together to carryout a universal moral message: caring for the stranger, the widow and the orphan.

I mention this to call attention to a great example of what mutual respect, understanding and dialogue can achieve. I mention this because it cost far less than war and its effects were far more fruitful. I mention this because those who would believe that the only way to speak with Muslims or other groups we do not understand is with the sword are wrong and have proved to be wrong.

We are repeating this model of dialogue and education throughout the world with many religions, ethnicities and groups. Edgar Bronfman, the World Jewish Congress, our colleagues in Jewish communities in nearly 100 countries, and yes, even the great State of Israel have begun talks with leading members of the Muslim community to try to find the common language of peace and respect that we can stamp out the darkness and truly shine a light on this troubled world. We have made progress with other Christian groups and we continue to build bridges between nations and ethnic rivals.

We will succeed whether this body or parliaments around the world assist us or not. We will

succeed because we have to succeed. We will succeed because Armageddon is not an ends for which we are to yearn and help facilitate. Assured mutual destruction is not a policy that builds hope, heals wounds and avoids conflict. It is a tinderbox waiting to be set aflame. We can do more and we must do more. The current generation and our children deserve our best efforts. They shall inherit the Earth and we consider with care what we are leaving them.

Thank you.