

Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission:

On behalf of Yossi Abramowitz, president of UCSJ, and our entire board - and indeed our entire international movement - I thank you for this important opportunity to talk about anti-Semitism and xenophobia in the Russian regions and, more important, I believe, to talk about the direct relevance this subject has to the broader dimensions of policies that address no less than war and peace as a result of 9/11.

I am joined by Dr. Leonid Stonov, a former Moscow Refusenik leader and member of the Moscow Helsinki Group, who now works out of our affiliate, Chicago Action for Jews in the Former Soviet Union, and directs and coordinates UCSJ's human rights bureaus across the former Soviet Union (FSU); and Nickolai Butkevich, UCSJ's research and advocacy director, who is the general editor of the report we are issuing today – Anti-Semitism, Xenophobia and Religious Persecution in Russia's Regions - 2001.

I am honored to share this opportunity with Ludmilla Alexeeva, the chairman of Russia's oldest and most prestigious human rights organization, the Moscow Helsinki Group and president of the International Helsinki Federation. UCSJ and MHG have been partners since the 1970s - sometimes informally and, more recently, through our joint efforts in human rights monitoring across the Russian Federation under the auspices of a vitally influential pilot grant of NED and a major four-year grant from USAID, to which UCSJ was the sub-grantee. That effort has resulted in the establishment of a truly integrated human rights movement for the first time in Russian history.

Mr. Chairman, I recognize the difficulty of gaining the attention of the public or of policymakers to this subject at a time when questions of international terrorism, of weapons inspection, indeed of war and peace and America's obligations to protect and defend democracy are the riveting issues of the day. But isn't this precisely one of the crucial byproducts of 9/11 - that we are now able to tune into the signals that were always out there? It is my hope to assert a new paradigm of human rights and national security: xenophobia, of which anti-Semitism is a central component, represents the opposite side of the same coin as extremism and terrorism and, as such, needs to be ranked as a major category of human rights violations. Moreover, monitoring strategies to combat it are available, as our report demonstrates, and, in light of 9/11, they must now rank with weapons inspections in our national security arsenal. The collective failure of the NGO and intelligence communities to adequately address these connections was one element of the colossal failure of imagination that has permitted the success of extremism and terrorism in the Middle East, in Russia, and at the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Raging racism demonstrates a dangerous breakdown of rule of law that threatens Russia's economic and political stability and vulnerability to extremism and terrorism. It calls out for American vigilance and assistance.

The intelligence, diplomatic, foreign aid and human rights communities must all take this insight as a mandate for action. And because the Helsinki Process is the natural father of this paradigm, what better venue to explore its implications than this Helsinki Commission? Throughout the Cold War and up to today, your commission, Mr. Chairman, has been the principal venue to keep front and center the crucial nexus between human rights and national security.

Our report is based on the year-long monitoring throughout 2001 by UCSJ's Moscow "Bureau on Human Rights," whose director is Alexandr Brod. The heart of the work is the presentation of 250 pages of detailed reports of incidents in 63 of Russia's 89 regions. While most of the report comprises the reports of UCSJ's network of monitors and media articles, a new feature can be found in many regional chapters that contain mini-reports on local conditions from our monitors in their own words. No summary can adequately convey the abject and cumulative horror one finds by reading the hundreds of incidents of hate crimes and hate speech described in this report, page by page, region by region. But beyond the human tragedy, this is a document of a failed criminal justice system that it is in both Russia's and America's interest to repair.

The report also documents certain improvements, including President Putin's unprecedented support of the Jewish community and his calls to combat anti-Semitism. But it also documents the increase in xenophobia aimed primarily at citizens, mostly Muslim, from the Caucasus. Without question, "anti-Semitism and xenophobia have increased in the past year, and they have a strong correlation with anti-democratic and anti-market sentiments, as well as a level of ethnic Russian nationalism that may imperil the still fragile, multi-ethnic structure of the Russian Federation."

This report, and the very capability to produce it, carries policy implications for President Bush and President Putin as they strive to combat international and domestic terrorism. First and foremost, in addition to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, we must never again forget that "words and behavior also matter." The very length of our report is but a palpable reminder that racists do not pursue their murderous goals by stealth. They pursue conquest through intimidation. They announce their intentions in advance. They thus can be interdicted through effective monitoring and the holding of their host governments accountable for their actions.

This truth applies equally to Hitlerian dictators, totalitarian hegemons, and draconian terrorists. Recall that Mein Kampf promised World War II and the Holocaust; the Doctor's Plot and the anti-Zionist committee foreshadowed Stalin's purges; bin Laden's earlier fatwa against Jews and America predicted 9/11; the anti-Semitic and anti-Israel propaganda, official newspaper editorials and cartoons and school curricula of the Palestinian Authority and many Arab countries gave the

lie to their intentions for the Oslo peace process; and the anti-Jewish pogromist threats from the floor of the Russian Duma in the late 1990s signaled the build-up of anti-Semitic and xenophobic invective and violence leading to today's rampaging gangs of neo-Nazi skinheads.

But their audacity and impunity are also their weakness if we but learn to take them seriously because, unlike the difficulties of inspections and seeking well concealed weapons, extremists are more often easily identified and monitored and they depend on the acquiescence, if not collaboration, of their host governments.

I am optimistic in making these observations because I believe our government has never been as well positioned to make human rights an integral element of national security policy as it is today. The superb efforts of those in the Department of State who produce annual country reports on human rights and religious persecution, worldwide, have never been stronger. And their success owes much to their demonstrated ability to receive and utilize monitoring reports like ours from the entire human rights community. And make no mistake, the international community reads and is influenced by these reports.

What's new and quite remarkable, however, is the "National Security Strategy" document issued by the President in September. I believe this document is unprecedented in the extent and priority it places on human rights and American values. In the national debate today, one would gather that this document is all but a declaration of war. But the very first paragraph states, "In the twenty-first century, only nations that share a commitment to protecting basic human rights and guaranteeing political and economic freedom will be able to unleash the potential of their people and assure their future prosperity." And in Part II, before the sections about combating terrorism, the strategy asserts: "America must stand firmly for the nonnegotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the absolute power of the state; free speech; freedom of worship; equal justice; respect for women; religious and ethnic tolerance; and respect for private property."

With respect, may I only quibble with one of the President's words. With respect to the Russian Federation, other states of the former Soviet Union, and non-democratic nations elsewhere, while we may hope that these values are "nonnegotiable," it is incumbent on America and the human rights community, indeed to negotiate for and demand these rights. And, in the case of Russia, the President could not have appointed an ambassador better equipped for such a challenge than Alexander Vershbow. And, in this vein, may I also note that President Putin is also well served in such pursuits by the exemplary efforts of Russia's Human Rights Ombudsman, Professor Oleg Mironov, who last Friday joined with our Moscow Bureau director, Alexander Brod, in publicly signing a formal agreement of cooperation in furtherance of human rights and combating anti-Semitism and xenophobia generally.

Mr. Mironov stated at the press conference that: "One of the sharpest problems of Russian society is the increase in political extremism, and social, racial, ethnic and religious hostility. The spread of fascist ideas and terrorism present a threat to the constitutional system, human rights and freedoms. Unfortunately, law enforcement agencies very often qualify anti-Semitic and nationalistic incidents as hooliganism or ordinary quarrels."

Russia's internal security is important to us for many reasons- some that tend to be overlooked in today's debates. Russia remains a vast and important nuclear power with widespread influence, whose leader shows some limited inclinations to moving toward democracy and who has unquestionably cast his lot with America in the war on terrorism. But because of the rise in domestic terrorism and the weaknesses in its institutions for securing rule of law, Russia's vast and tenuously guarded stockpile of the materials and components of nuclear weaponry make it a major target for countries and terrorists alike who would hope to purchase or steal nuclear capabilities for mass destruction. Our report documents one dimension of Russia's, and therefore America's vulnerability.

We cannot say with scientific accuracy that the 30% increase in the size of our report compared to last year's version proves a 30% increase in the absolute number of incidents. The strengthening and broadening of our monitoring network across Russia in the past year may be a partial explanation. Unquestionably, however, the problem is becoming more dangerous, one factor being the qualitative and quantitative increase in the strength and viciousness of the neo-Nazi skinheads; another, the pro-bin Laden and heightened anti-Jewish, anti-Israel and anti-America rhetoric of some Russian Muslim leaders since the terrorist attack of 9/11.

An apt summary of our report's findings is cited in a quotation that introduces our Executive Summary by no less an authority than Izvestiya "Hatred exists everywhere, but there are few places where the assortment of hatred is as broad as it is in our country. There are few places where society is so indifferent to it. In Germany each skinhead attack on Turks, Kurds or Jews becomes a matter of great alarm for the police and thousands-strong public demonstrations against extremism and xenophobia. In our country such things do not provoke a very notable reaction, but what is noticeable are the consequences."

Among many responses to such extremism, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared, on July 25 of this year, "if we allow the development of this bacillus of chauvinism, or nationalist or religious intolerance, we will destroy the country." Despite the excellent rhetoric, governmental response has been minimal, many regional authorities openly collaborate with neo-Nazis; perpetrators of hate crimes, therefore, essentially behave with impunity.

As our report finds:

"From Kaliningrad in the far west to the Pacific port city of Vladivostok, from the Arctic city of Murmansk to the southern resort area of Krasnodar, regional authorities as a general rule ignore the activities of dangerous hate groups who aim violent rhetoric and actions against minority groups, refusing to prosecute hate crimes or, at best, classifying them under the euphemistic term "hooliganism." These hate groups range from largely unorganized skinhead gangs to more structured neo-Nazi groups like the People's National Party or the successors of Russian National Unity to officially approved paramilitary Cossack formations. While there have been improvements in the reactions of the authorities to anti-Semitic incidents as compared to previous years, official reaction is still disturbingly weak. Worst of all, after a welcome decline in anti-Semitic incidents in 2000, the summer and early fall of 2001 witnessed a rash of beatings of Jews (Moscow, Orenburg, Kostroma and Omsk) and arson attacks on Jewish property (Ryazan, Kostroma, Kazan), none of which have been solved. Nor have the vast majority of past anti-Semitic attacks-the synagogue bombings in Moscow in 1999, the attack on a Jewish school in Ryazan in 2000, and numerous other incidents-resulted in any convictions."

President Putin continues to make positive gestures towards Russia's Jewish community, attending major Jewish events, praising the positive role of Jews in Russia's history and contemporary life, and strongly condemning anti-Semitism. This has helped create a more confident climate for Jews in Russia, spurring a continued renaissance of Jewish life in Russia, as witnessed by the growing number of synagogues being returned to the community after decades of government ownership, the increasing coverage in the media of Jewish communal activities and statements by Jewish leaders about domestic and international events, and a rising willingness of Jewish leaders in some parts of the country to stand up publicly for their rights.

However, under the veneer of stability and justifiable celebration of the amazing achievements of the past decade, there remains a sense of unease. Jewish leaders' constant assertions that "there is no state anti-Semitism in Russia" are only partially correct. While it is certainly true that the active promotion of anti-Semitism is no longer state policy, as it was throughout much of the Soviet period, passive state anti-Semitism persists. While there has been some slight improvement in the enforcement by federal prosecutors of laws against the incitement of ethnic hatred, as a rule they fail to properly apply these laws, or ensure that regional prosecutors do, sending a message to anti-Semites that their actions will likely go unpunished. Far too much latitude has been granted to regional officials in how they react to the activities of hate groups or extremist politicians, leaving many to choose to take no action at all to protect local minorities. In a November 2001 meeting with regional police officials, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Aleksandr Chekalin admitted as much when he stated: "We have gone too far in our inaction against extremist youth."

The consequences of this permissive attitude towards hate groups are especially clear in Moscow, where for years police have ignored skinhead attacks against foreign students, dark-skinned market traders, and even diplomats from African and Asian countries. Only now, when the problem has become so acute that skinhead violence is an almost daily event in Moscow, have the city authorities begun to take the skinhead problem seriously. Unfortunately, it may be too late to contain the growth of skinhead groups, who have increased their membership and geographical scope to a stunning degree.. Aleksandr Verkhovsky of the "Panorama" think tank-a leading authority on extremist groups in Russia-put the problem succinctly: "Extremist pro-Nazi paramilitary organizations propagandizing the ideas of racial hatred operate openly in Russia, and the state does nothing to prevent this."

This trend of passive state anti-Semitism and racism is even more apparent in the judicial branch, where there are numerous examples of judges refusing to punish anti-Semites and other extremists, even when they have clearly violated the law. While the justice system tends to come down hard on even minor offenses, anti-Semitic and racist violence is often treated with kid gloves.

The State Duma remains a hotbed of anti-Semitism and racism, especially among deputies from the KPRF and the LDPR. State Duma deputies from Bryansk and Krasnodar Krai regularly violate laws against public hate speech, as does Deputy Speaker of the State Duma Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. In 2001, hate literature was openly sold in the State Duma, including David Duke's "The Jewish Question Through the Eyes of an American" and several anti-Semitic newspapers.

On the regional level, President Putin has made some impressive progress in his efforts to reverse years of radical decentralization under the Yeltsin administration. Many regional laws have been brought into accordance with federal legislation, secessionist movements that threatened the integrity of the Russian Federation have been successfully undercut (with the obvious exception of Chechnya), significant sources of revenue have been redirected from the regions to the center, and the central government has achieved the right to remove governors who go too far in abusing the law. However, despite the appearance of strength, the central government remains weak, and this weakness, when combined with the indifference of many central government officials to the problems of anti-Semitism, racism, religious persecution and other human rights violations, has helped create a system of government in which regional leaders make some basic concessions to the Kremlin in return for the right to treat their citizens almost any way they choose. As a result, minority groups are treated differently from region to region, largely at the whim of the local bosses.

The Jewish community is a case in point: In a few extreme cases they are demonized by regional leaders (Kursk, Krasnodar) or by media controlled by the regional administration (Vladimir,

Oryol, Bryansk), in a few more their concerns are taken very seriously (the Moscow city administration being the most obvious and important example), while in the bulk of Russia's regions, the authorities neither attack nor adequately defend Jews against grassroots anti-Semitic violence. In a prime example of collaboration between hate groups and regional authorities, in at least three regions (Ryazan, Voronezh, Tver), a successor organization to the RNU (Russian Rebirth) was officially registered in 2001-two years after the RNU was banned in Moscow. In addition, the manner in which President Putin is tackling the problem of the central government's weakness shows an alarming tendency on his part to focus more on the levers of power than on the rule of law. Jews and all other citizens of Russia will never be truly safe until a democratic, law-based system develops, yet Russia under Putin seems to be sliding more and more towards authoritarianism

In recent weeks, and so not covered in our report, two related allegations of impropriety by the Kremlin raise a certain cognitive dissonance when compared to President Putin's public exhortations against extremism and anti-Semitism. These improprieties lend credence to our concern that the president's rhetoric is far from matched by action. First, the Ministry of Justice has approved quite expeditiously the registration of a new political party - the National Power Party (NDPR) - whose leaders are recognized neo-Nazis and whose web site is explicitly anti-Semitic. In the second case, according to the September 23 report in Novaya Gazeta, while it is well known that Putin's political party, "Unity" has created a youth organization called "Walking Together," the paper asserts that these youth leaders are also skinhead leaders. The article is based on an interview with, inter alia, Alexy Mitriushin, head of the north-east division of Walking Together and also a leader of "Mad Stallion," a skinhead group known for the June soccer riot on Manezh Square in Moscow. One common interest of the two groups is to disrupt anti-globalist demonstrations. Controlling Nazi parties and youth organizations so as to create public enemies of the state is a time-tested tactic of the Soviet KGB. It is not unreasonable to ask, will the real Vladimir Putin step forward? On the other hand, our Moscow Bureau's growing relationship with the Ministry of Justice, and especially with Russia's Human Rights ombudsman, are genuine causes for optimism.

A new, disturbing trend that emerged in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US is the radicalization of some of Russia's Islamic community. A few Russian Muslim leaders, most but not all of them self-proclaimed, publicly repeated the radical Islamist canard that Israel secretly planned the September 11 attacks. Rallies in support of the Taliban and the PLO have taken place in some predominantly Muslim regions. So far, such opinions are shared by a small minority of Russian Muslims and are mostly concentrated in Chechnya and Dagestan, yet this is obviously a growing trend that requires continued monitoring.

"Islamophobia" remains widespread, reflected in the opposition by some regional authorities to the building of mosques and the tendency of much of the Russian press to equate Islam with

terrorism, without taking into account the diversity of the Islamic faith. Here, local leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), who in several cases have lobbied against the construction of mosques, are as complicit as when they distribute anti-Semitic literature like "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" in church bookstores. The war in Chechnya drags on, brutalizing and radicalizing Chechen civilians and creating a whole generation of rabidly racist Russian soldiers and policemen. Like the Jews, treatment of minority Christians and Muslims varies from region to region, largely dependent on the whims of the local authorities.

With the whole world riveted on the terrorist attack, a very dark day for the human rights community was overshadowed. I am referring to the U.N. Conference on Racism at Durban, South Africa where most Western human rights NGOs stood by and allowed Palestinian and Arab NGOs to succeed in passing an anti-Semitic resolution condemning Israel as a racist country. In that case, in my judgement, they were both unused to dealing with anti-Semitism as a primary human rights violation and, due to their traditional focus on governmental abuses of individuals, unused to holding governments accountable for the behavior of non-governmental terrorists and grassroots perpetrators of violence and hatred. A signal exception was the behavior of the International League for Human Rights, the Moscow Helsinki Group and other Russian and eastern European human rights NGOs who defended Israel against the majority of NGOs in a losing cause. It was in the context of these issues, heightened by the events of 9/11, that prompted UCSJ to convene, in the Moscow offices of MHG on July 8, a conference of Russian and Western human rights NGOs to explore the implications of this new human rights paradigm. Other organizations involved in the review included Memorial, the Sakharov Center, the Center for Human Rights, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and, by email, the International League for Human Rights. Mr. Chairman, I think the essence of our report and its implications can be summarized in six points:

1. Anti-Semitism, and anti-"black" xenophobia, have risen again dramatically in part as a consequence of 9/11. It reflects a coalition of neo-Nazis, like the RNU and skinheads, religious nationalism, e.g. Cossacks and elements of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), Islamic extremists, e.g. certain Mulahs and Chechens, and old-line fascists and communists, especially in the Duma and certain major regional mayors and governors.

2. Anti-black (Caucasus) discrimination is, in part, a byproduct of the government's Chechnya-related propaganda plus on-going persecution in Moscow city. The central government's responsibility for anti-Semitism is of a different character. State-sponsored anti-Semitism is a relic of the Soviet era. Indeed, President Putin has made unprecedented and exemplary statements committing his government to combating anti-Semitism, nationalism and extremism. However, there is governmental complicity in passivity and acquiescence, e.g., failure to investigate and prosecute, failure to hold anti-Semitic political leaders accountable. As the saying goes, Putin is talking the talk, but not sufficiently walking the walk. Our report can help him to

do better.

3. The Human Rights Ombudsman and his regional network is the most consistent national actor in training official and public attention on the important problem that anti-Semitism and xenophobia are flourishing with impunity. Putin's direct and public support of his work would send a powerful and constructive message.

4. Anti-Semitism and xenophobia are crucial national security issues beyond the hate and intimidation aimed at specific targets. That they are allowed to flourish with impunity is a critical bellwether or indicator of the grave weakness of human rights, rule of law, and civil society generally, especially the criminal justice system and the moral mood of the country. The failure to adequately confront these evils carries with it two kinds of dangerous consequences for Russia. First, it emboldens terrorists and nourishes the social fabric that tolerates them. This is both a domestic and international security threat because it raises the chances for terrorists and extremists to gain access to nuclear materials and devices - arguably a greater threat to world peace than state-controlled weapons. Second, the breakdown of human rights and civil society is both an undue burden on Russia's budget and economy and a profound disincentive to foreign trade and investment.

5. All of this suggests an evolving new paradigm for viewing the nexus between human rights and national security. The history of the human rights movements, which importantly developed in Russia, along with the Jewish national emigration movement (Refuseniks), began in the 1970s and was heavily influenced and promoted by the Helsinki Process. The emphasis was placed on defending the individual against abuses of rights by the governments; and in this emphasis, although the issues of anti-Semitism and xenophobia were recognized evils, they were not seen as major priorities for human rights campaigners. The events of the past year have demonstrated the need for a new paradigm, one that brings two issues up to parity with the traditional values for human rights: (i) that anti-Semitism and xenophobia are central human rights abuses in their own right and as bellwethers as well as predictors of escalating danger; and (ii) that governments and human rights activists alike must also focus beyond concern for governmental abuse of the individual to include concern for the dangers to society at large of non-state criminals and terrorists.

6. Accordingly, human rights monitoring of their behavior, as it is performed by MHG and UCSJ, is the human rights/national security analogue to arms inspections. The results should be taken seriously by policymakers, and factored into all intelligence analyses and data bases. It can no longer be relegated to the "feel good" priorities of political speechwriters.

These lead me to some final observations and recommendations.

The Helsinki Process, involving the concerted advocacy of governments and NGOs, pressed the Soviet bloc on matters of mutual security and disarmament, expansion of market economies, and the reduction of human rights abuses. It was a relentless, collegial process that contributed importantly to the peaceful collapse of Communism across the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The lessons of the Helsinki Process are applicable to the West's response to the Arab countries which likewise encourage anti-Semitic and anti-American values and repress the human rights of their citizens, not least their women and children. We should be monitoring anti-Semitic actions and rhetoric in Russia, the Middle East and Europe as we monitor and inspect access to weapons of mass destruction, and we should be prepared to assist and encourage Arab states as well as Russia and other former Soviet republics in moving toward democracy and rule of law as we did throughout the Cold War.

Likewise, the NGO community must return to its campaigning mode to combat xenophobia and anti-Semitism across Europe and the former Soviet Union. President Bush has walked the walk in a distinguished manner. His September 2002 "National Security Strategy of the United States of America," is perhaps the foremost and most unprecedented examination of human rights as being integral to national security policy. We call on him to see that his military, diplomatic, foreign aid, trade and intelligence agencies internalize these human rights values, which are at the heart of American values, into all international and bilateral affairs.

UCSJ urges OSCE to hold a Supplemental Human Dimension Implementation meeting on anti-Semitism during 2003 to review and identify best practices for monitoring and reporting. In this, as in all other relevant issues, we commend the Helsinki Commission's actions and moral leadership.

Finally, no Russian leader can compare to President Putin in analyzing the problems of extremism, anti-Semitism and civil society failures that must be overcome for Russia to flourish as a leading democratic country. But a country that allows extremists to flourish with impunity, bans the visits of religious leaders while inviting the likes of David Duke; registers Nazi political parties while discouraging more liberal parties and many human rights NGOs has a long way to travel. A leader who treats environmentalists as spies, is suspicious of a free press, and who supports anti-Semitic and anti-American leaders at home and abroad has a lot of reforming to do notwithstanding his cooperation against the most prominent terrorists. We believe his most important next steps must be to strengthen his criminal justice system so as to secure his country from the scourge of anti-Semitism and xenophobia and the risk of theft of nuclear materials by domestic and foreign terrorists. This is a cause that the American government needs to assist in, and the NGO human rights community needs to insist on. Unlike the confrontations of the Soviet era, we have much to collaborate upon.