

**Helsinki Commission Hearing on:
Global Threats, European Security and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation
Wednesday June 16, 2010**

**Representative Christopher H. Smith, Ranking House Member
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

Opening Statement

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning and welcome to everybody--welcome especially to our witness, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, Mr. Joao Soares, and also to Spencer Oliver, General Secretary of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

Mr. Chairman, you and I have been active in the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE for over ten years. We have seen the value of the Parliamentary Assembly in the fight against human trafficking and anti-Semitism, to mention two issues on which I have focused much of my work within the Parliamentary Assembly—and I thank you for being right there with me, leading on these issues. And in regard to both of these terrible scourges, trafficking and anti-Semitism, it was the Parliamentary Assembly that put these issues on the forefront of the OSCE agenda.

The Parliamentary Assembly has been a vital part of the OSCE, and in recent years perhaps it has been the most vital part. Consistently it has been the Parliamentary Assembly that has pushed human rights issues to the top of the OSCE agenda. The governments of most OSCE Participating States have usually been reluctant to put human rights first. They have criticized so-called “parliamentary interference” in OSCE policy, but they have been quick to take the credit for the PA’s human rights initiatives.

One of my chief concerns at this hearing will be to learn how the Parliamentary Assembly can be even more effective in promoting human rights within the OSCE. Few people know the OSCE as well as President Soares and, Mr. President, I very much look forward to your testimony. I am sure we will all benefit from it immensely.