

OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism
Introductory Remarks For Session I
As prepared for delivery by Rep. Christopher H. Smith
Chairman, United States Helsinki Commission
Berlin, April 28, 2004

Thank you, Madame Moderator.

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, friends,

It is my great honor and privilege to address this distinguished body of individuals. Today, here in Berlin, once the epicenter of an obscene policy to eliminate European Jewry, we have gathered together to confront and, to the best of our abilities, vanquish a highly disturbing resurgence of anti-Semitism. I want to thank our German hosts for offering this historic opportunity.

We gather against the backdrop of a spike of anti-Semitic violence that has swept through much of the OSCE region, particularly in Western Europe. Unparalleled since the dark days of the Second World War, Jewish communities throughout Europe and North America again are facing violent attacks against synagogues, Jewish cultural sites, cemeteries and individuals. It is an ugly reality that won't go away by ignoring or by wishing it away. It must be defeated. Even in the eastern portions of the OSCE region, anti-Semitic acts occur in places long devoid of a Jewish presence.

This increase in violence is a chilling reminder that our societies still harbor a dangerous collection of bigots and racists who hate Jews.

Because of this grim reality, we gather to enlighten and motivate with particular emphasis on what practical steps we must take not just to mitigate this centuries-old obsession, but to crush this pernicious form of hate.

At the recent UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva, the representative of the Holy See said anti-Semitism is a "distinct form of intolerance with religious and racial characteristics" and is the "oldest and most continuous form of religious intolerance ever known."

George Washington's 1790 letter to Touro Synagogue stated clearly that America was to be a place of tolerance for all, and said America "gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance." One year later, France became the first European country to emancipate its Jewish population and offer equal citizenship.

More recently, during the horrors of World War II, Chairman-in-Office Passy's Bulgaria chose not to abandon its Jewish citizens. In the OSCE context, the 1990 Copenhagen Concluding document represented the first time an international body spoke specifically to the crime of anti-Semitism.

We hope the results of this Conference will serve as a blueprint for serious and hopefully bold action. Our words here in Berlin, however, must be repeated at home, with frequency, passion and tenacity and matched – and even exceeded – by deeds.

If our fight is to succeed, we need government officials at all levels to denounce, without hesitation or delay, anti-Semitic acts wherever and whenever they occur. No exceptions. The purveyors of hate never take a holiday or grow weary, nor should we. Holocaust remembrance and tolerance education must dramatically expand, and we need to ensure that our respective laws punish those who hate and incite violence against Jews.

The 18th century British statesman and philosopher Edmund Burke prophetically said “the only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing.”

When national leaders fail to denounce anti-Semitic violence and slurs, the void is not only demoralizing to the victims but silence actually enables the wrongdoing. Silence by elected officials in particular conveys approval – or at least acquiescence - and can contribute to a climate of fear and a sense of vulnerability.

For the last two years, President Bush and Members of Congress from both parties have spoken out repeatedly and forcefully. We have tried to do our “due diligence” to know the truth and to decipher trends. At one of our hearings in 2002, for example, the Simon Wiesenthal Center offered compelling evidence that showed that anti-Semitic incidents were increasing significantly in Western Europe, and the Anti-Defamation League reported that more than 1,500 anti-Semitic incidents occurred in the United States in both 2002 and 2003. We decided that more needed to be done. Last summer I, along with my friend and colleague Ben Cardin, sponsored a bipartisan congressional resolution denouncing anti-Semitism. The measure passed (412-0). When I return to Washington later this week, we will introduce another resolution to highlight what we are attempting to do here in Berlin. Furthermore, we partnered with Gert Weisskirchen and members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to address the unprecedented rise of anti-Semitic violence at our Annual Session in 2002. Together, our delegations have organized forums – in Berlin, Washington and Vienna – on anti-Semitism. In both 2002 and 2003, the OSCE PA unanimously approved resolutions condemning anti-Semitism.

So, clearly, our words this week are extremely important. I respectfully submit that they must be matched with deeds. Paper promises must be followed with concrete actions. To that end, there is no excuse for not putting in place an aggressive, sustainable monitoring program.

Last year’s Maastricht Ministerial Council decision and last week’s Permanent Council decision committed all participating States to collect and keep records on reliable information and statistics on hate crimes, including anti-Semitism. According to a report on “Official Indifference” written by Human Rights First, of fourteen OSCE countries reviewed, nine had no systematic monitoring. A surgeon can’t remove a cancer or prescribe a course of treatment, without documenting the nature, scope, and extent of the disease. We must find out what’s going on!

For its part, the United States has been collecting hate crime information for almost 15 years. Many of the 50 states in the U.S. have enacted their own laws addressing hate crimes.

Congress passed the federal Hate Crimes Statistics Act in 1990, which requires the Attorney General to collect data each year about crimes that “manifest evidence of prejudice.” The most recent report available, the 2002 Hate Crimes Statistics Report, documented that religious bias motivated 19.1% of all hate crime incidents in the U.S. Of this total, a whopping 65.3% were anti-Semitic in nature.

One positive by-product of reporting is the impact it has on police. When solid reporting is coupled with police training fewer acts of anti-Semitic violence are likely to occur. The public sharing of this information at home and with the OSCE enhances accountability and allows interested communities and NGOs to craft and implement strategies. I therefore urge each of us to enhance our monitoring mechanisms and to promptly forward these findings to ODIHR.

A top to bottom review of laws, the enforcement of existing laws, and the enactment of new laws will help enormously. When France experienced a particularly high rate of anti-Semitic attacks in 2002, the French enacted a new statute. Mr. Pierre Lellouche, with us here today, was the champion behind these vital reforms. It is hoped that in each of our countries penalties that are commensurate with crimes motivated by anti-Semitic bias will have a chilling effect on those contemplating acts of hate, and surety of punishment for those who do.

Finally, if we are to protect our children from the dark evil of anti-Semitism, we must reeducate ourselves and systematically educate our children. While that starts in our homes, the classroom must be the incubator of tolerance. It seems to me that only the most hardened racist can remain unmoved by Holocaust education and remembrance. Only the most crass, evil, and prejudiced among us can study the horrors of the Holocaust and not cry out: Never again!

I urge you to consider making your nation a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. Of the 16 current Task Force members, fourteen are OSCE participating States. Open to all countries willing to meet certain criteria, applicant countries must commit to open all public and private archives, establish some form of Holocaust remembrance, usually a national day of remembrance, and create or improve Holocaust education curricula.

In 1991, my home state of New Jersey established the Commission on Holocaust Education to promote Holocaust and genocide education standards throughout my state. The Commission is unique, and perhaps a model for others, as it regularly surveys the status of Holocaust education and the design of curricula to ensure that all schools are teaching about the Holocaust and genocide.

The Commission has developed more than 2,000 pages of material to aid New Jersey educators in teaching children about this painful, but important, topic. The New Jersey Commission is an innovative model for other OSCE participating States and local governments to emulate.

The Anti-Defamation League’s “A World of Difference” Institute has delivered programs to more than 450,000 American teachers about the Holocaust and intolerance. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, the FBI, partners with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the

Anti-Defamation League teach new FBI trainees about law enforcement's role in the 1930s and 40s in abetting the Holocaust. Conducted at the Holocaust Museum, these sessions leave an indelible impression and lead to greater sensitivity and understanding. .

Abraham Lincoln once said concerning slavery: "To sin by silence when they should protest, makes cowards of men." Silence my friends is not an option. Nor is inaction.

Thank you.