



United States Mission to the OSCE

OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism

As prepared for delivery by Fred Zeidman
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Workshop on Promoting Tolerance: Media, i.a. Internet, NGOs and Religious Leaders
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for the honor of introducing this workshop. As you know, I chair the governing council for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and I follow the news very closely, especially as it relates to understanding of the history of the holocaust and contemporary anti-Semitism. It is clear from media reports that anti-Semitism is on the rise in the OSCE area. This is why this Conference, and particularly the commitments the OSCE participating States will make here in Berlin, are so important.

This past Monday, an article appeared in the Berlin Tagesspiegel entitled "The Risk of Being a Jew". It illustrates the "daily routine" of many Jews – a routine that is continuously subject to the menace of anti-Semitism. Many Jews cannot go about their everyday lives without fear. The threats are as diverse as the perpetrators. We all know this problem, and we are here in Berlin to discuss ways to fight it.

The media are well placed to have a decisive influence on public opinion. A case in point is the recent violence in Kosovo, where some media played a significant role in exacerbating tensions and promoting ethnic violence. The Ministers of the 55 participating States gathered in Maastricht in December 2003 implicitly recognized the power of the media, noting that racist, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic propaganda in the media and elsewhere can fuel hate crimes. While a special OSCE meeting will be held in June to discuss the relationship between propaganda on the Internet and hate crimes, it would be appropriate here to discuss the role of the Internet in promoting tolerance. As with any communications medium, the Internet is a tool that can be used for varying purposes. Those of us gathered here, as interested and enlightened parties, should harness the power of the Internet and use it to further our cause – creating a world in which every person, regardless of his or her religious belief or ethnic background, has the right to worship and live as he or she sees fit.

Non-governmental organizations have a vital role to play in realizing this goal. In the Decision on Combating Anti-Semitism approved last week by the Permanent Council in Vienna, the participating States commit to "encourage and support...NGO efforts in these areas". Among the most important ways in which NGOs can engage are:

- Speak out every time a public figure makes anti-Semitic remarks, so that such statements are widely rejected by the public;

- Educate the media on what anti-Semitism is, how stereotypes hurt both individuals and society as a whole, and how anti-Zionism frequently equates with anti-Semitism;
- Reach out to other NGOs in all elements of society, in order to develop partnerships in the fight against intolerance.

Although the active involvement of NGOs is critical, we should not overlook the importance of religious leaders in promoting tolerance. The increase in inter-faith dialogue over the past few decades has had a positive effect on mutual understanding and appreciation among the many religious groups around the OSCE area and the world. However, there is still much to be accomplished in this area. Religious leaders must all become leaders in the fight against intolerance, both individually and in partnership with each other, with NGOs, and with the media, to promote tolerance and inter-religious harmony. An important aspect of this fight would be to move beyond established patterns of dialogue, to reach out to non-traditional partners.

As Secretary Powell observed in a May 2002 speech to the Anti-Defamation League in Washington, the world today “is still torn by centuries-old conflicts - all too often differences of color, culture and creed are treated as threats rather than as assets.” All of us gathered here have a responsibility to face this unfortunate reality, and to do all in our power to correct it.