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*‘Lessons Learned? Holocaust remembrance and
Combating anti-Semitism in 2008’*

Vienna, 10 November 2008



Check against delivery!

Mr Chairman,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we commemorate the 70th anniversary of the November pogroms in Nazi-Germany in 1938. In the night following the 9th of November 1938 thousands of Jewish shops were attacked, hundreds of synagogues were torched, Jewish citizens were beaten and nearly one hundred Jews were murdered. The pogroms were an act of organized anti-Semitic state terror. But they were carried out by individuals that under the Nazi regime were able to act out their hatred of Jews.

That night has correctly been seen as the '*Auftakt*' to Hitler's political and social project, encompassing the targeted persecution and annihilation of entire ethnic groups and cultures.

70 years later, in 2008, we still face anti-Semitic hate crimes in the OSCE Region. They target Jewish persons, synagogues, Jewish properties, Jewish cemeteries and Holocaust memorials. These crimes are carried out by both organized groups and by those who meet their victims at random.

ODIHR is alarmed and concerned about the persistent high number of anti-Semitic crimes and incidents taking place across the OSCE region and the extreme violence with which some of these crimes are committed. Let me give you a few recent and chilling examples:

- In July in Lviv, Ukraine, several people shouting anti-Semitic slogans stormed into a Jewish centre and beat two workers who were inside.
- In July in Paris, France, a 17-year-old Jewish teenager was severely beaten by a gang of five youths. He suffered head injuries and slipped into a coma.
- In October in St. Louis, United States, a number of students beat their classmates during what some students called “Hit a Jew Day”.
- In October, 30 Polish hooligans shouting anti-Semitic slurs attacked Bratislava’s chief rabbi in the centre of the city shortly before a football match between Poland and Slovakia.

- In Vilnius, Lithuania, in August, anti-Semitic graffiti was painted on Jewish community buildings.
- In Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, gravestones at the Krasnaya Etna cemetery were vandalized on numerous occasions between May and August.
- In Rhodos, Greece, a group of students posted a video on YouTube that showed a young man urinating on a Holocaust memorial that commemorates the murder of 1,600 Jews killed by the Nazis during World War II. The clip included rock music with lyrics threatening the Jews of Rhodos and praising Adolf Hitler and the Auschwitz death camp.

Clearly, important historic lessons have still not been learned by all.

Non-violent manifestations of anti-Semitism are no less disturbing. As we pointed out in our *2007 Hate Crime Report*, anti-Semitic stereotypes and sentiments persist not only in extremist circles, but also in mainstream society. The financial crisis of the last weeks has shown again that often, when things go wrong, anti-Semitic prejudice soars.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

In 2004, OSCE participating States committed themselves to combat anti-Semitism. They agreed to focus on the following areas:

- First, ensuring that their legal systems foster a safe environment free from anti-Semitic harassment, violence or discrimination;
- Second, promoting educational programmes for combating anti-Semitism;
- Third, promoting remembrance of, and education about, the Holocaust;
- Fourth, combating hate crimes fuelled by racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic propaganda in the media and on the Internet;
- And finally, collecting and maintaining reliable information and statistics about anti-Semitic crimes, and reporting such information to our Office.

At the same time, the OSCE participating States tasked ODIHR to follow closely anti-Semitic incidents in the OSCE, in full co-operation with other OSCE institutions, NGOs and relevant

international institutions – most of them are present at this table. States also requested ODIHR to report its findings to the Permanent Council and to the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting and make these findings public. In addition, ODIHR was tasked to systematically collect and disseminate information on best practices for preventing and responding to anti-Semitism and offer advice to participating States in their efforts to fight anti-Semitism.

Following these taskings, the position of an Adviser on Combating Anti-Semitism was created in ODIHR's Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department. [I would like to recognise the dedicated work of our colleague in the ODIHR, Norbert Hinterleitner, who is here with us today.]

Also in 2004, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office appointed three personal representatives as part of the overall fight of the OSCE in combating discrimination and promoting tolerance. One of these three representatives, Prof. Weisskirchen, focuses on combating anti-Semitism.

In recent years, several OSCE Declarations and Decisions have underlined the importance of education - including education on the Holocaust and anti-Semitism - as a means for preventing and

responding to intolerance and discrimination and for promoting integration and respect for diversity. In 2005, OSCE States were called upon to strengthen public and private educational programmes that promote tolerance and non-discrimination, and to raise public awareness of the existence and the unacceptability of intolerance and discrimination.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me briefly give you an overview of the work our office has done to assist participating States in their efforts to combat anti-Semitism.

ODIHR collects information that we receive from the participating States through their National Points of Contact – in 53 of the 56 OSCE participating States such contact points have been established so far. We also use reliable information and analysis provided by academic institutions, non-governmental monitoring institutes and the media. The analysis of this information is published every October in the annual Report *“Hate Crimes in the OSCE Region”*. One chapter of the report is dedicated to anti-Semitic hate crimes and hate incidents. The last report was published last month and is also available on our website.

Our Office also collects best practices of tools, guidelines, initiatives and international standards on combating anti-Semitism on its *Tolerance and Non-discrimination Information System* (TANDIS). This web portal allows governmental bodies, researchers, educators and the civil society to find a wide range of information regarding combating anti-Semitism.

The ODIHR is very active in the field of education. In cooperation with several OSCE participating States and experts from non-governmental institutions our Office has developed guidelines for educators and teaching materials for secondary school students. These materials, also available outside, I would like to present in detail:

The ODIHR has published a study “*Education on the Holocaust and on Anti-Semitism: An Overview and Analysis of Educational Approaches*” in 2006. The study identifies good practices by OSCE states and civil society, provides recommendations, and highlights new challenges that need to be addressed in education on the Holocaust and on anti-Semitism.

I would also like to draw your attention to our guidelines for educators entitled “*Addressing Anti-Semitism: Why and How?*”

These guidelines were developed in co-operation with Yad Vashem. They provide educators with facts, background information and good practices on how to address anti-Semitism in the classroom. The original English version of these guidelines was published in December 2007 and they have now been translated into Croatian, German, Polish, Russian, Slovak and Spanish. The materials encourage teachers not to treat anti-Semitism as a taboo but to address the phenomenon openly and provides educators with suggestions on how this can be done.

Our Office is also working in 10 OSCE participating States on *teaching materials on anti-Semitism for secondary school students*. The materials focus on both the history of anti-Semitism and its contemporary manifestations and are developed in close cooperation with experts in the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and with local experts in each of the countries. These experts ensure that the materials are adapted to the needs of the educational system of each country. In this context I would like to mention that the Austrian Ministry of Education recently showed interest in co-operating with the ODIHR on developing a customized Austrian country version of the teaching tools.

Currently, our office is starting the implementation phase in the ten countries where the materials are being developed. In Germany, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine training sessions for

teacher trainers and seminars for teachers are being held until the end of 2008. In Croatia, Denmark, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, and Spain seminars and train-the trainer sessions are planned for 2009.

In co-operation with Yad Vashem, the ODIHR has produced guidelines entitled *“Preparing Holocaust Memorial Days – Suggestions for Educators”* which highlight best practice modules. These guidelines provide educators with suggestions how Holocaust commemorations can be prepared and carried out in schools. The guidelines stress the importance of early involvement of students in the preparation of commemoration activities. The guidelines are currently available in 13 languages.

Another publication, *“Holocaust Memorial Days in the OSCE Region”*, gives an overview of governmental practices of how Holocaust Memorial Days are commemorated across the OSCE region. It provides detailed information on which countries have a designated day for the commemoration of the Holocaust and which activities or events are being organized by the government or governmental institutions.

All the materials I mentioned can be downloaded from our OSCE-ODIHR website or from the Tolerance and Non-discrimination Information System (TANDIS).

In the next years we will focus on disseminating these materials through seminars and public events, to schools and relevant institutions that deal with training of teachers. We would like to continue our work on combating anti-Semitism and hope for future co-operation with a growing number of participating States.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me finally stress the importance of building partnerships with other international organisations represented on this panel. Each organisation brings a different approach which complements and reinforces the collective efforts of all our organisations to combat anti-Semitism and promote human rights. It is the commitment to strengthen our partnership that brings us here today and which will continue to guide our future co-operation.

Thank you for your attention.

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ODIHR publications

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