

ENGLISH only



## United States Mission to the OSCE **Statement on Anti-Semitism**

Delivered by Mark B. Levin, Executive Director, NCSJ at the  
Anti-Semitism Conference, Vienna  
June 19, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Weisskirchen, Mayor Giuliani, distinguished speakers, delegates and non-governmental representatives, members of the media:

I have been privileged to participate in the Helsinki process for more than 20 years. The Helsinki Accords empowered human rights activists in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to challenge tyranny. Today, the OSCE is a vital resource for human rights.

This is why I am pleased to address this session, focused on the role of governments and civil society, a dimension in which NCSJ has worked so closely with parliamentarians, officials and organizations in the United States, Europe, and the former Soviet Union. As the representative of an organization relating to issues in the Soviet successor states, that has worked within the Helsinki process since its inception, I also wish to mention the constructive leadership of parliamentarians including our own Members of Congress who are attending today, Representatives Smith and Hastings, who have worked with Dr. Weisskirchen to forge a multilateral coalition of legislators from across the OSCE region.

As an umbrella organization that includes nearly 50 national American Jewish organizations and 300 local community groups, including a number of those participating here, NCSJ would like to associate itself with the interventions of those partner organizations.

NCSJ has drafted findings and analysis, most of which are available on the World Wide Web at "ncsj.org", so I will concentrate here on recommendations for maximizing the OSCE's mechanisms and capabilities for combating anti-Semitism throughout the region. My remarks will first address procedural suggestions for the OSCE as a multilateral institution and, second, specific policies and programs for individual participating states to initiate, apply and adopt on the local and national levels.

## **OSCE Mechanism**

In keeping with the July 2002 OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Resolution and the December 2002 U.S.-German Letter of Intent, governments and parliaments can draw attention to the issue and reinforce the legitimacy of positive forces within civil society by holding public hearings and legislation, and through strong public statements. Such activities provide an official platform for non-governmental entities and demonstrate that anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic violence are negative forces that threaten the public safety and freedom of all citizens. As Ambassador Randolph Bell has urged, we must call evil by its proper name, refusing to ignore or excuse it – and what better way than through public proceedings recorded in the official record and disseminated domestically and internationally.

The ‘bully pulpit’ is not only available to heads of state. Public statements by government leaders and legislators at every level are indispensable to motivating society, bureaucracies, and legislators. Official condemnations of anti-Semitism and calls for greater protection of minorities help shape public attitudes and reduce ambiguity.

How can we translate events such as this groundbreaking conference into an ongoing process with real results? It is vital that OSCE Secretariat, through the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, and the Chairmanship-in-Office maintain staff responsibility on a continuing basis. Assigning specific contact names not only reflects the priority with which OSCE approaches the issue but also facilitates better coordination and follow-up. We should not underestimate the impact of this conference appearing at the top of the Web pages for OSCE, the U.S. State Department, and other official venues.

Although the current trend of anti-Semitism is sadly well known, international monitoring empowers local activists, compels diplomats to become experts and advocates, and reminds governments and societies that these issues are integral to modern democracy. This has been our experience with training of federal and local officials in the United States and is increasingly evident in the successor states.

It has also been our experience at NCSJ that the Helsinki process embodied in the OSCE has generated a unique partnership between governments and non-governmental organizations. This in turn has enabled progress as much from the bottom up as from the top down. We must strive to apply this partnership model to individual countries, whether their democracy is old or new.

## **National Level**

On the national level, the Soviet successor states and the Baltic nations had to develop strategies to combat anti-Semitism even as they were emerging from the yoke of communism. While this remains an ongoing and uneven process, countries such as Latvia were instrumental in advocating for this conference to take place through the OSCE and the Chairman-in-Office. In many ways, these “new democracies” have a track record from which parliamentarians and

governments to their west should observe, and from which we can draw new models for combating anti-Semitism in our own countries.

Many leaders in the successor states, including Russian President Putin and Ukrainian President Kuchma, speak out regularly against anti-Semitism, which is an important first step. Enacting and implementing laws institutionalizes the positive rhetoric and perpetuates the engines of freedom. Unfortunately, however, legislation that elevates certain religions over others contradicts the very spirit of tolerance and pluralism that could best ensure the end of anti-Semitism. And though law enforcement authorities in most successor states do respond by providing added security and investigating anti-Semitic acts, too often these same officials refuse to classify the incidents as anti-Semitism, dismissing the crimes as “hooliganism” or random violence. They do not call evil by its proper name.

When we speak of civil society, this includes officially recognized organizations as well as every individual in every community who takes a stand. OSCE, together with national and local institutions of government, must reach out as well as respond to these initiatives by providing a clearinghouse for ideas, data, and contacts.

Legislation to counter extremism and racial violence is gaining support. Conversely, laws that set up two classes of religion – traditional and non-traditional – or abdicate decision-making authority to local officials presume that the state can decide which faiths are legitimate and which are not.

I have only the time to outline these few among the many important strategies for combating anti-Semitism through government and civil society. Let me end by expressing my appreciation to those who have worked so hard to make this conference happen, including the OSCE Secretariat and Chairmanship, and the individual delegations including my own under the leadership of Mayor Giuliani.