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Global Perspective on Hatred and Anti-Semitism: U.S. and Canada

Inter-parliamentary Coalition Combating Anti-Semitism (ICCA)

Ottawa Conference

November 8, 2010

U.S. Rep. Chris Smith

I'd like to thank my very good friends, the Honorable Irwin Cotler and Minister Jason Kenny—for their extraordinary work in combating anti-Semitism and for making this conference a success—and John Mann, MP, whose vision launched the Inter-parliamentary Coalition for Combating Anti-Semitism (ICCA) in 2008.

I'd like to extend warm greetings from the president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, Petros Efthymiou from Greece. In addition to my participation here today as a member of the ICCA Steering Committee, President Efthymiou requested that I represent the Parliamentary Assembly to convey his strong support for our efforts to address combating anti-Semitism.

All of us here recognize that anti-Semitism is a unique evil. We know it is a distinct form of intolerance, the oldest form of religious bigotry, and a disease of the heart that has very often led to murder in the last century, the Holocaust.

At this morning's ICCA session Prime Minister Harper was not only eloquent and bold, but his leadership on combating anti-Semitism on the world stage is unparalleled. He is a man not just of words, but deeds. I hope our Canadian hosts understand that he inspires us all to greater commitment and advocacy.

Colleagues, we all know that anti-Semitic hate on the Internet is a serious and growing problem. It is profoundly troubling that many of the world's most vicious anti-Semitic Web sites are hosted in the United States — poisoning hearts and minds. Anti-Semitism is also manifesting on social networking Web sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, and user-generated sites like YouTube and in the reader

comments to online news articles. The ability to post such hate speech anonymously is fueling the occurrence.

Much of what we find online is the retailing of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, from the long-exposed lies of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion to newly concocted lies about the 9/11 terrorist attack. Though the latter may have limited resonance in North America, I'm afraid they echo far beyond our shores.

I vividly remember several seemingly bright college students in Bethlehem telling me that no Jews were killed in the World Trade Center attack because Israel was a part of the plot and Jews had all been forewarned. I was outraged and told them so. I told them that I knew and was a personal friend of several Jewish widows who had lost their husbands in that barbaric event. The students appeared to be unmoved, preferring to cling to a big lie. They said they got their information to a large extent, on-line.

Canadian law provides the authorities more scope to act against extreme manifestations of Internet hate. Congress and the President must do more to take down hate-filled sites in cyberspace.

Another very alarming trend: what Natan Sharansky and others labeled the "new anti-Semitism" is expanding everywhere, including on college campuses throughout the U.S. and Canada. This new anti-Semitism applies double standards to Israel, in order to delegitimize and demonize it. It tends to wax and wane with the situation in the Middle East – and a breakdown of the peace process or another Intifada would very likely result in a new burst of anti-Semitism on many campuses.

As to anti-Semitic crimes, the trend line in the U.S. appears to be flat or declining slightly in recent years, whereas in Canada it has increased somewhat. The U.S. Anti-Defamation League reported, in its 2009 Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents, 1,211 acts of vandalism, harassment, and physical assaults on Jewish people or Jewish-owned property in the U.S. While the report noted overall incidents of traditional anti-Semitism declined but remained at a "sustained and troubling" level, the long-term, ongoing explosion of on-line anti-Semitism "cemented 2009 as one of the most serious in a generation."

We are very far from our goal of eradicating anti-Semitism. This is especially true in light of the fact that twelve percent of Americans, over 30 million people, still hold anti-Semitic attitudes, which is revealing. The efforts of groups like the ADL, the American Jewish Committee, B'nai B'rith, the Wiesenthal Center, the Canadian Jewish Congress, and so many others has been bearing fruit – but they and we still have a lot of work to do.

One particularly shocking incident in the U.S. was the June 2009 attack by a crazed, hate-filled gunman at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., resulting in the death of a guard. This museum is a powerful symbol of the solidarity of America with those murdered in the Holocaust, and with the Jewish people, so the attack on that museum was a day of shame. Though Congress and the President condemned the attack in the strongest terms, the sad reality is that the killer cannot be dismissed as an aberration. He was connected to a movement that promotes violence, harassment, and vandalism against Jews in America on a daily basis.

Effective police work has thwarted numerous potential acts of anti-Semitism. For example, on October 18, 2010, four homegrown Muslim extremists – the Newburgh Four – were convicted and face numerous life sentences for plotting to bomb two New York synagogues and shoot down military aircraft. They will be sentenced March 24. It all started with a tip from a conscientious citizen – which led to infiltration of the group by law enforcement.

Both the U.S. and Canada, as members of the OSCE, are bound by OSCE commitments to collect and maintain reliable statistics on anti-Semitic hate crimes, and to promote Holocaust remembrance and education. Both countries meet these commitments. U.S. law provides for enhanced penalties for crimes committed against people or property where the motive, in whole or in part was based on religious hate.

The United States government has been collecting hate crime information for almost 20 years and the Canadian government does likewise. One positive consequence of reporting has been the impact it has on police, interested communities, and NGOs. The public sharing of this information allows them to craft effective strategies to fight anti-Semitism.

Under U.S. civil rights law, additional penalties are meted out to those convicted of a crime where they are “motivated by the victim’s actual or perceived...religion.” The U.S. Department of Homeland Security provides state and local law enforcement with terrorism and hate crime training including those cases that involve anti-Semitism. And the U.S. Department of Justice enforces numerous laws to prohibit anti-Semitic discrimination in housing, employment and health care.

Promoting Holocaust education is also an important part of the legislator’s responsibility. In the U.S. and Canada, Holocaust remembrance and education is widespread, and it is widely understood that, in order to protect our children from the dark evil of anti-Semitism, we must systematically educate them. Canada particularly deserves to be congratulated for Holocaust Education Week, which is one of the largest annual programs in the world.

I am also glad to be able to say that the U.S. government, attempts to fight anti-Semitism around the world. One way we do this is through interparliamentary diplomacy. In 2002, in response to a sudden, frightening spike in anti-Semitism in several countries, I chaired a congressional hearing during which we first proposed the idea for a conference on combating anti-Semitism under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). At that hearing Dr. Shimon Samuels of the Wiesenthal Center in Paris testified and said, “The Holocaust for 30 years after the war acted as a protective Teflon against blatant anti-Semitic expression (especially in Europe). That Teflon has eroded, and what was considered distasteful and politically incorrect is becoming simply an opinion. But he warned ominously, “cocktail chatter at fine English dinners can end as Molotov cocktails against synagogues.”

President Bush agreed and directed the State Department to press for the convening of such a conference. Convinced we had an escalating crisis on our hands, we pushed for action and reform. Many of you in this room were active in this, including and especially members of the steering committee of the ICCA.

Those efforts directly led to important OSCE conferences on combating anti-Semitism in Vienna, Berlin, Cordoba, Bucharest, and Astana – where I might add Canadian parliamentarians and representatives of the Canadian Jewish Congress played crucial roles. In those conferences Participating States made solemn, tangible commitments to ensure that our words are put into action. The record of implementing these commitments has fallen short.

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 not only chronicles religious based discrimination, hate and violence worldwide—including anti-Semitism—but prescribes 18 separate actions and penalties for any nation designated a “country of particular concern” (CPC). This year’s egregious offenders—CPC countries—include Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, China, and North Korea, among others.

I authored the provisions of the Global Anti-Semitism Review Act Of 2004 that created the Office to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism in the U.S. State Department. That office has done excellent work – you’ll hear from Special Envoy Hannah Rosenthal tomorrow. Last month, I introduced new legislation—the Combating Anti-Semitism Act of 2010—to strengthen it, chiefly by requiring the Office to report more frequently and in greater detail on anti-Semitism around the world. The U.S. government can then use these reports in international human rights diplomacy.

As legislators we have a responsibility to fight anti-Semitism with all the tools available to us: hearings, resolutions, conferring with foreign parliamentarians and governments, funding, and legislation. Such a full-court press will result in civil rights protections, Holocaust education, hate crime laws, improved police training, and systematic statistics gathering on anti-Semitic incidents.

- Anti-Semitism is much more than a Jewish issue – it is a human rights issue.
- Anti-Semitism should be of direct concern to everyone.
- Anti-Semitism is a threat to everyone.

We must increase our efforts to ensure that anti-Semitism is stopped anywhere, any way, by anyone—and that the world’s promise of “never again” truly is NEVER AGAIN.