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Anticipating and Preventing Deadly Attacks on European Jewish Communities

*U.S. Rep. Chris Smith (NJ-04), Chairman
Hearing of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
Excerpts of Opening Remarks
April 19, 2016*

Good afternoon to everyone joining us today and especially to our witnesses, Rabbi Andy Baker, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office on Combating Anti-Semitism, and Director of International Jewish Affairs for the American Jewish Committee; Jonathan Biermann, Executive Director of the crisis cell for the Belgian Jewish community, who will testify by video link from Brussels; John Farmer, Director of the Faith-Based Communities Security Program at Rutgers University; and Paul Goldenberg, Director of the Secure Community Network.

Today we will discuss how to anticipate and prevent deadly attacks on European Jewish communities. The recent terrorist attacks in Brussels were reminders that Europeans of all religions and ethnicities are at risk from ISIS. But there can be no European security without Jewish security. As we have seen so many times in so many places, violence against Jewish communities often foreshadows violence against other religious, ethnic, and national communities.

ISIS especially hates the Jewish people and has instructed its followers to prioritize killing them. The group's cronies targeted the Jewish Museum of Belgium in May 2014, the Paris kosher supermarket in January 2015, and the Great Synagogue in Copenhagen in February 2015, and murdered people in all of them. Some thwarted plots have revealed plans to target even more Jewish community places and kill even more Jewish people. Other Islamist terrorist groups share its hatred and intent.

However, terrorist and terrorism only account for some of the annual increases in violent anti-Semitic attacks in Europe over the past few years. Survey and crime data show that anti-Semitic attitudes and violence in Europe are most rife in Muslim communities. Anti-Semitic attitudes, and non-terroristic anti-Semitic violence, have also risen across the religious, political, and ideological spectrum.

There are many different aspects of combating anti-Semitic violence. For example, European Jewish and Muslim civil society groups are collaborating with each other to counter violent extremism and hatred that impacts their respective communities. Today's hearing though will zero in on the role of law enforcement agencies and especially on their relationships with Jewish community groups. These partnerships are essential, according to Jewish communities and experts on both sides of the Atlantic. That is why I authored House Resolution 354 as a blueprint for action and why the House passed it unanimously last November.

Our witnesses will testify about what European law enforcement agencies, their governments, and Jewish community groups need to do to ensure these partnerships are formalized and effective. They will discuss the ideal roles for the OSCE, the United States, and other civil society groups, in supporting these initiatives. The witnesses will also share what can be learned from the experiences of law enforcement agencies and Jewish communities to counter terrorism, and strengthen public safety more broadly. Their insights will help guide the efforts of the U.S. government, the Congress, and my fellow Helsinki Commissioners, especially Commission Co-Chairman Senator Roger Wicker, and Ranking Member Senator Ben Cardin, who has been the Special Representative on Anti-Semitism, Racism and Intolerance for the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly since last March.

Today's witnesses are world-class experts and practitioners on the subject.

Rabbi Baker has been one of the most important figures in combating anti-Semitism and addressing Holocaust-era issues over the past few decades. He was first appointed as Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office on Combating Anti-Semitism in 2009 and every subsequent Chairman-in-Office has reappointed him. He has been the Director of International Jewish Affairs for the American Jewish Committee since 2001 and with the organization since 1979. He has served in senior leadership roles in many initiatives and been publicly commended many times over, including by heads of state in countries like Germany, for his efforts. Rabbi Baker and I have worked together closely to combat anti-Semitism for many years.

I am pleased that we are able to hear a voice from Brussels, where ISIS followers murdered 32 people and injured more than 300 others only a month ago. Jonathan Biermann is Executive Director of the crisis cell of the Belgian Jewish community and was in charge of the cell at the time of the attack on the Jewish Museum in 2014. A lawyer by profession, he has been a member of the City Council of Uccle, a municipality in Brussels, since 2012 and is currently an Alderman on the Council. Biermann is a former Political Adviser to the President of the Belgian Senate, the Minister of Development Cooperation, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. He brings the perspective of a Brussels native and resident born into a family very involved in the Jewish community.

John Farmer is the Director of the Faith-Based Communities Security Program, part of the Institute for Emergency Preparedness and Homeland Security, at Rutgers University, the State University of my home state of New Jersey. The Program spearheaded a major conference last July on "Developing Community-Based Strategies to Prevent Targeted Violence and Mass Casualty Attacks" in collaboration with the FBI, Department of Justice, and others. He was the Attorney General of New Jersey from 1999 to 2002 and Senior Counsel to the 9/11 Commission. Attorney General Farmer was later the Dean of the Rutgers Law School.

Paul Goldenberg is the National Director of the Secure Community Network, a national homeland security initiative of the American Jewish community, and is also the CEO of Cardinal

Point Strategies. A New Jersey native, for decades he was part of the law enforcement community, starting as a cop – including years of undercover work – and eventually as the first Chief of the Office of Bias Crimes and Community Relations for the state of New Jersey. Goldenberg has relevant experience with the OSCE, as the former Program Manager and Special Advisor for the OSCE/ODIHR Law Enforcement Officer Training Program for Combating Hate Crimes. He is currently Co-Chair of the Department of Homeland Security’s Fighter Task Force, Vice Chair of the DHS Faith Based Advisory Security Council, and a Special Advisor and Member of the Secretary of Homeland Security’s Combating Violent Extremism Working Group.

Finally, I am pleased to recognized the presence here today of Paul Miller, a Member of the Board of Overseers of Rutgers University. Throughout his law career, he was involved in public safety and security initiatives – including for the Jewish community – and continues that important work now through the Miller Family International Initiative at the Rutgers School of Law.

To you, and to our witnesses, a warm welcome. I will now turn to my fellow Commissioners and other Members for any remarks they wish to make. We will then shift to opening statements from witnesses, starting with Rabbi Baker, and then moving to questions from Commissioners and other Members.