

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

4TH DISTRICT, NEW JERSEY

CONSTITUENT SERVICE CENTERS:

1540 Kuser Road, Suite A9
Hamilton, NJ 08619-3828
(609) 585-7878
TTY (609) 585-3650

108 Lacey Road, Suite 38A
Whiting, NJ 08759-1331
(732) 350-2300

2373 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3004
(202) 225-3765

<http://chrissmith.house.gov>



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEES:

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH, AND
HUMAN RIGHTS**

CHAIRMAN

**WESTERN HEMISPHERE
SUBCOMMITTEE**

**COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

CHAIRMAN

**CONGRESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE
COMMISSION ON CHINA**

CHAIRMAN

DEAN, NEW JERSEY DELEGATION

Combating Anti-Semitism

*By Rep. Chris Smith
Anti Defamation League National Leadership Conference
Mayflower Renaissance Hotel, May 1, 2012*

In 1982, during my first term in Congress, I traveled with the NCSJ to Moscow and Leningrad to meet Jewish refuseniks in their homes and to engage Soviet leaders.

For hours on end, we heard stories of Soviet physical and mental abuse, systematic harassment, gulags and psychiatric prisons, and an array of seemingly wanton, brutal acts of anti-Semitism.

To apply for an exit visa—a universally-recognized human right, which at least on paper the Soviet Union had recognized—was to invite the cruelty and wrath of the KGB and other small-minded, morally stunted thugs. To courageously seek freedom rendered the refuseniks ineligible for employment in Lenin’s farcical “workers’ paradise.”

The Soviet system, militantly atheistic and morally incoherent, wouldn’t let you leave, but didn’t want you to stay either—a bizarre paradox.

In Dr. Alexander Lerner’s Moscow apartment, a small group of us heard Sharansky’s mother admonish us to do more for her son, because his life was in jeopardy. “Raise Anatoly’s situation with the highest officials,” she asked us. Which, of course, we did.

To a new 27-year-old Congressman, however, it was all very bewildering and deeply troubling—why do they hate the Jews? Why the anti-Semitic obsession?

A few years later and shortly after Sharansky’s release, I visited Perm Camp 35 in the Ural Mountains—a horrific gulag filled with prisoners of conscience.

While there, I saw the solitary punishment cell called the Shizu—where Natan Sharansky suffered and persevered. To the utter dismay of Lt. Col. Osin—Perm Camp’s KGB warden—Congressman Frank Wolf and I interviewed and videotaped most of the prisoners and pushed for their release. In time, they all

got out, following the path paved by Natan Sharansky, one of the bravest, wisest, and most noble men on earth.

Then, almost suddenly, the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact collapsed and hope and expectation soared. A new day dawned—the matriculation of several dictatorships to democracy, respect for human rights, the peace dividend, and a better future for Jews.

It didn't take long, however, to be disappointed. So in 1995 I chaired a Congressional hearing—the first ever-- entitled, *The Rising Tide of Global Anti-Semitism*, as it was becoming increasingly clear that the status of Jews in many countries was actually deteriorating.

More hearings followed.

At one particular Congressional hearing I chaired in 2002, Dr. Shimon Samuels of the Wiesenthal Center in Paris said, “The Holocaust for 30 years after the war acted as 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.” He warned ominously, “cocktail chatter at fine English dinners can end as Molotov cocktails against synagogues.”

In response to what appeared to be a sudden, frightening spike in anti-Semitism in several countries I, joined by then Senator George Voinovich of Ohio, proposed at that 2002 hearing the idea of a conference on combating anti-Semitism under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

Convinced that we had an escalating crisis on our hands, we teamed with Bush Administration officials including and especially U.S. Ambassador to the OSCE Stephan Minikes, Abe Foxman and the ADL, Rabbi Baker of the American Jewish Committee and other prominent Jewish leaders and organizations to push for such a conference.

Those efforts led directly to a series of high-level OSCE conferences on combating anti-Semitism, which took place in Vienna, Berlin, Cordoba, and Bucharest, followed by several specialized summits as well.

ADL played a critical role at each of the conferences—in the planning, at the conference itself and in follow-up.

At the Berlin Conference on Combating Anti-Semitism, Abraham Foxman, a Public Advisor to the US delegation said: “European leaders have made a positive commitment to look not only at the root causes of anti-Semitism and its manifestations, but to take concrete action against hate with education and anti-bias programs. This important declaration represents an end to European denial that a problem exists and recognition that the disease of anti-Semitism cannot be eradicated unless it is first diagnosed, and then treated.”

At the same time, ADL leaders stressed that European leaders must make clear that attacks against synagogues and other Jewish institutions are unacceptable, especially when the excuse for such attacks is anger over Israel's policy toward Palestinians. "An attack against a Jewish house of worship is not a political statement. This is anti-Semitism," said Mr. Foxman. "You need to have the guts to say what it is."

Unparalleled since the dark days of the Second World War, Jewish communities around the world were and are facing violent attacks against synagogues, Jewish cultural sites, cemeteries and individuals. Anti-Semitism is an ugly reality that won't go away by ignoring or wishing it away. It must be defeated.

This increase in violence is a chilling reminder that our societies still harbor a dangerous collection of bigots and racists who hate Jews.

Today, in some countries, progress has indeed been made, and without collective action things might be noticeably worse. Deterrence is always difficult to measure with any accuracy.

Still, anti-Semitic acts have not abated in some countries, and in nations in the Middle East, the situation has actually gotten worse.

Thus we gather this morning at the Mayflower to motivate, share best practices, and organize with particular emphasis on what practical steps we ought to take, not just to mitigate this centuries-old evil, but to crush this pernicious form of hatred.

If our fight is to succeed, we need government officials at all levels to denounce, without hesitation or delay, anti-Semitic acts wherever and whenever they occur. No exceptions. The purveyors of hate never take a holiday or grow weary, nor should we.

Holocaust remembrance and tolerance education must dramatically expand, and we need to ensure that our laws punish those who hate and incite violence against Jews.

When political leaders fail to denounce anti-Semitic violence and slurs, the void is not only demoralizing to the victims but silence actually enables the wrongdoing. Silence by elected officials in particular conveys approval—or at least acquiescence—and can contribute to a climate of fear and a sense of vulnerability.

In 2004, I sponsored the key amendment that became law that established a special office and a special envoy at the US Department of State to monitor anti-Semitic hate on a global scale and craft strategies to defeat it. My amendment to the Global Anti-Semitism Review Act also beefed up reporting on anti-Semitism in the annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and the International Religious Freedom Report.

As you know, unlike most countries, the United States has been collecting hate crime information for over two decades.

Many of the 50 states in the U.S. have enacted their own laws addressing hate crimes. Congress passed the federal Hate Crimes Statistics Act in 1990, which requires the Attorney General to collect data each year about crimes that “manifest evidence of prejudice.”

The most recent FBI report available—the 2010 Hate Crimes Statistics Report—documented that religious bias resulted in 1,552 victims of an anti-religious hate crime - a whopping 67% were anti-Semitic in nature. By way of contrast 12.7% were anti-Islamic, 4.2% anti-Catholic, 3% anti-Protestant, and this, despite the fact that only 1.7% of the U.S. population, or about 6 million people, are Jewish.

One positive consequence of reporting is the impact it has on police. When solid reporting is coupled with police training fewer acts of anti-Semitic violence are likely to occur. The public sharing of this information enhances accountability and allows interested communities and NGOs to craft and implement strategies.

Meanwhile, on another level of reporting, many victims of anti-Semitic acts fail to report the crime, perhaps out of fear of retaliation, or lack of awareness as to how to register such a complaint. That has got to change.

Enhanced penalties—for crimes committed against people or property where the motive, in whole or in part, was based on religious hatred—is key to properly punishing or deterring these types of crimes.

The Hate Crimes Sentencing Enhancement Act signed into law in the U.S. in 1994 directs the U.S. Sentencing Commission to provide a sentencing enhancement of “not less than 3 offense levels for offenses that the finder of fact at trial determines beyond a reasonable doubt are hate crimes.” Enhanced penalties make clear that we mean business.

Finally, if we are to protect our children from the evil of anti-Semitism, we must re-educate ourselves and systematically educate our children. While that starts in our homes, the classroom must be the incubator of religious tolerance.

It seems to me that only the most hardened racist can remain unmoved by Holocaust education and remembrance. Only the most crass, evil, and prejudiced among us can study the horrors of the Holocaust and remain unmoved.

Abraham Lincoln once said: “To sin by silence when they should protest, makes cowards of men.” There are no cowards in this room. Thank you.