

Foxman Remarks For Rep. Chris Smith

Tuesday, May 1, Breakfast

This morning, we have the honor of recognizing one of the most ardent champions of human rights in the United States Congress.

First elected to Congress at the age of just 27, Representative Christopher Smith of New Jersey became one of the stalwarts in the fight for the rights of Soviet Jews to be able to emigrate and to practice their faith openly and with dignity.

During the darkest hours of Soviet oppression, Chris Smith and his colleague from Virginia, Frank Wolf, were the first Members of Congress to visit a Soviet labor camp in the Ural Mountains, Perm 35. He passionately pleaded for the freedom of Jewish Refuseniks and what we then called prisoners of conscience.

Today, he chairs the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission, an independent government agency that spotlights countries' compliance with a landmark human rights document – the Helsinki final act.

When anti-Semitic hate violence re-emerged in 2002 in communities across Europe, many Jews had nowhere to turn to report an anti-Semitic incident or to seek help. Chris Smith stood up again to be one of the most articulate and significant congressional voices of conscience.

Under his leadership, the Helsinki Commission was the first government body to convene a hearing that drew together the ADL and other advocates to call for action. The commission has been dogged and consistent holding regular hearings and finding every opportunity to press governments to do more.

Many of the ideas proposed in those hearings to hold governments accountable for their commitment to fight anti-Semitism are now U.S. policy and practice as a result of these efforts.

When other parliamentarians were too uncomfortable to address the incomprehensible reappearance of anti-Jewish hate violence at a meeting of European parliamentarians in Berlin, it was Chris Smith who said, "If we can't have this discussion inside our conference, let's hold our own side event to appeal to the media and the public."

Chris, I was proud to stand with you that day in Berlin, as I would be again, and as I am today.

Congressman Smith has mobilized a strong voice on many human rights issues as a leader on the Foreign Affairs Committee. He also serves as "special representative" on human trafficking for the Organization For Security And Cooperation (O.S.C.E.) in Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, and as an Executive Member of The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission.

Chris, the Anti-Defamation League is proud to honor you today for your indefatigable efforts to fight anti-Semitism and to defend the rights and human dignity of oppressed people everywhere.