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‘Where is the United States?’ —Amb. Ronald Lauder

*Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,
Global Human Rights and Int’l Organizations
U.S. Rep. Chris Smith (NJ04), Chairman
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Good afternoon and welcome to everyone joining us today. I particularly want to welcome our witnesses – Ambassador Ronald Lauder, the President of the World Jewish Congress; Mr. Roger Cukierman, President of the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions of France, and Mr. Dan Asmussen, Chairperson of the Danish Jewish Community.

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

Mark Levin invited me to be on that trip and has been a friend and mentor ever since.

For hours on end, Mark and I, and a delegation that included Sam Gejdenson, heard stories of Soviet physical and mental abuse, systemic 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 on paper at least, the Soviet Union had acceded to—was to invite the cruelty and wrath of the KGB and other small minded, morally-stunted communist thugs.

To courageously seek freedom rendered you 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.

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

This is the 9th hearing I’ve chaired on Combatting Anti-Semitism. Never in modern times however, has the need to defend Jews everywhere been greater. My next hearings will be on the explosion of Anti-Semitic hate on the college campus and Jewish community security.

For the first time since the Holocaust, the physical security of Jewish communities in Europe has become a top-level concern. Our hearing today will examine the horrifying state of affairs facing Jewish communities in Europe at this time.

At a Congressional hearing I chaired in 2002, Dr. Shimon Samuels of the Wiesenthal Center in Paris testified that, “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 cocktail chatter at fine English dinners can end as Molotov cocktails against synagogues.”

That’s exactly where we are now, thirteen years later – what was anti-Semitic “cocktail chatter” then has led us now to two people shot and killed at a synagogue and a Jewish cultural center in Copenhagen, and four killed in a terrorist attack on a kosher supermarket in Paris.

These are only the most recent outrages in a terrifying increase in extreme anti-Semitic violence – let’s not forget the May 2014 murder of four people at the Jewish Museum in Brussels, and the March 2012 murder of three Jewish children and a rabbi at a Jewish school in the French city of Toulouse.

Each of these four attacks was perpetrated by a killer with links to the jihadist movement. For too long, far too government officials, many of them mired in what Natan Sharansky summarized as the application of double standards and demonization of Israel, have reacted weakly to this danger.

Meanwhile, the threat has grown exponentially. Today, at least 3,000 and perhaps more than 5,000 EU citizens, have left to join ISIS in Syria, Iraq and other conflict zones. This is the recent estimate of Europol, the EU’s joint criminal intelligence body. It would be criminally irresponsible not to take this number as a warning of much worse to come, and to make every effort to prepare accordingly.

In 2002, in response to what appeared to be a sudden, frightening spike in anti-Semitism in several countries, including here in the United States, I first proposed the idea for a conference on combating anti-Semitism under the auspices of the organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Convinced we had escalating crisis on our hands, I teamed with several OSCE partners to push for action and reform. Many of the people and NGOs present in this room played leading roles. Those efforts directly led to the creation of the OSCE’s Personal Representative on Combating Anti-Semitism, which has been filled by Rabbi Andy Baker since 2009. Rabbi Baker has done outstanding work. Dogged and energetic, he has been the driver behind everything the OSCE has accomplished in fighting anti-Semitism in recent years.

My efforts with partners to put anti-Semitism on the OSCE agenda also led to important OSCE conferences on combating anti-Semitism in Vienna, Berlin, Cordoba, Bucharest – and last fall in Berlin. In each of these, participating states have made solemn, tangible commitments to put our words into action. In some countries, progress has indeed been made – institutions to fight anti-Semitism have been created, and they have done excellent work.

But it has not been enough to reverse the new anti-Semitism in Europe, and failed miserably to anticipate and prevent the arrival of jihadist anti-Semitism in Europe.

That is why we are here today, to review, re-commit, and re-energize efforts to stop the evil anti-Semitic violence that is threatening the Jewish communities of Europe.

We need to learn more about what must be done to ensure community security – how the communities see the threats they face, what they are doing about them, what the European governments are doing about them – and how everyone can and must do more.

We also need to learn how the U.S. government can be more effective especially in light of World Jewish Congress President Lauder's all important question: "where is the United States?" Ambassador Lauder will testify today: "once again, like the 1930s, European Jews live in fear...In my travels to all of these communities, I am asked the same question around Europe and the world: 'where is the United States? Why isn't the United States leading the world in this crisis?'"