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Anti-Semitism Across Borders

Chairman Chris Smith

Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations

Opening Statement

March 21, 2017

Good morning and welcome.

The Jewish people have survived and thrived from the times of Biblical antiquity to the present day – quite a feat, when you consider all the civilizations that have come and gone: the Hittites, the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Persians, Greece and Rome. Their presence has enriched the cultures of many civilizations and countries, from the Americas to Ethiopia to China. But just as the Jewish people have endured, so too has anti-Semitic hatred. This hatred has ranged from prejudiced slurs whispered in private, to the murder of more than six million Jews in the Holocaust.

Seventy two years after the Holocaust ended, anti-Semites continue to target the Jewish people for discrimination, destruction of property, and even death. This hearing will explore global threats to Jewish communities, the underlying ideologies, and what actions the United States, other countries, and international organizations should take.

Our first witness, Paul Goldenberg, National Director of the Secure Community Network, addresses “the current state of affairs in Europe, specifically the increased levels of hate motivated incidents impacting Jewish communities.” Mr. Goldenberg also asks whether “perpetrators on both sides of the Atlantic may be feeding each other.” He therefore emphasizes that “It is vital that the Congress, and U.S. government, identify, analyze, and respond to the cross-Atlantic links between anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic attacks.”

I convened this hearing so we can ensure that we are scrutinizing cross-Atlantic connections and solutions.

Our second witness, Rabbi Andy Baker, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chair-in-Office on Combating Anti-Semitism, and Director of International Jewish Affairs for the American Jewish Committee, testified in his written remarks that after the terrorist attacks in Paris, Brussels and Copenhagen, “No longer

were governments able to ignore the situation. They have responded.” He cautioned though that “problems still remain. Governments have taken different approaches, and some only in stop-gap measures.”

Rabbi Baker also warned that “We need to be clear-eyed in confronting and combating anti-Semitism, which manifests itself on both the right and the left.”

In his written testimony, our third witness, Mark Weitzman, Director of Government Affairs for the Simon Wiesenthal Center, explored a wide range of ideologies and manifestations of anti-Semitism. He flagged that the “regeneration of traditional antisemitism is all the more dangerous because, unlike the violent extremists of both left, right and radical Islam, it is now found in government circles and halls of power in countries that we define as Western democracies.”

Pointing to a trend in Europe and United States, Mr. Weitzman notes that “academic spaces are quickly becoming hotbeds of anti-Jewish bias, with students each year reporting greater discomfort at publicly identifying as Jewish or as supporters of Israel.”

The great Natan Sharansky has taught us powerfully about a “new anti-Semitism,” which targets the state of Israel. This modern manifestation of anti-Jewish hatred is as outrageous as its predecessors.

It is a virus indeed that causes the UN Human Rights Council to make Israel the only country permanently on its debate agenda. In this context, I applaud our new Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Nikki Haley for announcing on Monday that the U.S. will no longer participate in this frenzy of Israel bashing known as “Agenda Item 7.” Instead, she said, the US will only participate “to vote against the outrageous, one-sided, anti-Israel resolutions that so diminish what the Human Rights Council should be.”

The Human Rights Council is also the body that directed that the High Commissioner for Human Rights compile a blacklist of companies working with Israelis beyond the 1949 armistice line, including in Jerusalem’s Old City, the location of Judaism’s holiest site. This measure is self-evidently born out of the anti-Israel boycott, divestment, and sanctions, or BDS, movement that is disturbingly prevalent in many European countries and in college campuses across the U.S. Whether operating in universities, state government, or national and international institutions, this de-legitimization campaign aimed at Israel stigmatizes Israelis, and supporters of Israel, and can serve as a pathway for anti-Semitic influence.

I would also like to thank Stacy Burdett of the Anti-Defamation League for addressing troubling anti-Semitic trends in Latin America.

Before I introduce our witnesses, I will associate myself with a statement that Mr. Weitzman made in his written testimony. As he put it, “Fighting antisemitism has always been a bipartisan commitment, and in today’s fractured political world it is more necessary than ever that the US maintain its diplomatic and moral leadership in this issue.”

For as long as I have been a Member of Congress, there has been broad bi-partisan support for combating anti-Semitism. We have had success advancing key initiatives at home and abroad because members of Congress across the political and philosophical spectrum came together and refrained from partisanship.

It is my hope that this bipartisan consensus will continue, and that none will seek to score political points to advance a political narrative. Partisanship and politics have no place in this fight. Our effectiveness depends on being able to work together to end this evil and to ensure that Jewish communities around the world are safe and secure.