

Statement by Human Rights First

Plenary session 3: Combating Antisemitism

OSCE High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Nondiscrimination

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Human Rights First has long maintained that antisemitism must be a serious concern of the human rights community and has engaged in efforts to document incidents of antisemitic hate crime and press for governments responses.

Antisemitism is a unique and potent form of racism and religious intolerance and the OSCE rightly examines it as such.

At the same time, we see time and again that hatred does not exist in neat compartments. For example, antisemitism is at the core of organized racial supremacist groups in Western Europe and of broad nationalist movements in Eastern and Central Europe that also target Roma, immigrants, LGBT persons, and religious minorities among others. It is thus important that individuals and leaders from all faith and other communities come together to condemn antisemitism and other forms of hate violence and intolerance and press governments to adopt a comprehensive approach to hate crime that is inclusive of all victims.

There can be little doubt – and it seems to be widely recognized here – that States have much work to do to meet their tolerance commitments. I welcome the active efforts of Rabbi Baker to work with states toward meeting those commitments and I urge states to support and contribute to his convening in June that aims to examine the security needs of Jewish communities.

I will speak in more detail tomorrow in my introductory remarks in Panel 6 on what more states can be doing to confront antisemitic and other forms of hate crime violence. Let me comment now on another area of concern – the proliferation of antisemitic hate speech.

Violent hate crime often occurs in the context of virulent hate speech. In some countries, established political and religious leaders engage in persistent antisemitic discourse, attacking Jews through stereotypes, slanders, and scapegoating. In addition, Jews as a people are vilified in the context of attacks on Israel or Israeli policies. While criticism of Israeli government policies is certainly legitimate, criticism of Israel crosses the line to become antisemitism when it disparages or demonizes Jews as a people.

The presence of representatives of political parties in local and national government that openly espouse racist and antisemitic views and policies is a disturbing dimension of antisemitism's

continuing presence and a formidable obstacle in the path of efforts to confront it.

When hate speech involves direct and immediate threats of violence to particular individuals or institutions, governments must hold perpetrators responsible under criminal law. But confronting hate speech must not impinge on free expression and government leaders should recognize the limits of criminal law to as an effective tool in countering and rooting out hate speech. Indeed hate speech is in many cases a political and social problem, rather than a legal one.

Hate speech needs to be countered by clear public statements from a cross-section of political and civil society leaders that condemn prejudice and hatred and affirm the dignity and rights of all. These voices are needed more than ever to confront the growing wave of populist parties – such as *Jobbik* in Hungary, *Svoboda* in Ukraine, and Golden Dawn in Greece – developing constituencies across Europe.

Recently, in Hungary, a member of the *Jobbik* party stated that it was time to determine “how many people of Jewish origin there are here, especially in the Hungarian parliament and the Hungarian government, who represent a certain national security risk.” The comments rightly outraged many Hungarians and led to a rally, organized by Jewish and civic groups. More than 10,000 people reportedly attended the protest outside the parliament building. The rally included politicians from both the government and opposition parties. Some foreign embassies too issued statements of protest and concern against such remarks. This was a powerful example of the type of counterspeech much needed in Hungary – where antisemitism remains a serious threat – and elsewhere.

Sadly, such examples pale in comparison to the level of hate speech in the public space. Effective and consistent strategies for marginalizing these voices of intolerance are still sorely lacking across Europe and in many other parts of the world. Counterspeech must therefore be an essential component of a comprehensive strategy to confront antisemitic and other forms of intolerant speech.