



OSCE BERLIN CONFERENCE ON ANTI-SEMITISM, 28-29 APRIL 2004

Statement by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Mr Bill Rammell

Plenary session 1: Legislative and Institutional Mechanisms and Governmental Action, Including Law Enforcement

Mr Chairman, my Government subscribes to the statement by Foreign Minister Cowen on behalf of the European Union. I am pleased to take the floor on behalf of the United Kingdom.

First of all, I would like to thank the German Government for hosting this Conference, and Foreign Minister Passy for his work as Chairman in Office. And I am pleased to note as I look around me the high level of attendance that the conference has attracted: evidence indeed of the importance of to this issue.

It is particularly appropriate that this conference is being held in Berlin, given the terrible history of the Holocaust. Daniel Libeskind's stunning museum is a fitting memorial to the many who suffered and died during that era. But European anti-Semitism vastly precedes the Holocaust. The expulsion of Jewish communities from our countries, including from England in the 13th century, and the pogroms against them in centuries past bear witness to this. And it is too easy to fool ourselves into thinking that anti-Semitism can be consigned to a museum, that it died with the Nazis. The reality is that no country is ever free from intolerance, including anti-Semitism. The UK is no exception. And all governments have a duty to combat these phenomena.

Certainly the British Government is committed to tackling anti-Semitism, both at home and abroad. British Jews, about 300,000 of our fellow citizens, are an integral part of our society. It is our duty to protect them as it is to protect all members of our community, both directly, through law enforcement, and indirectly, through education and dialogue designed to overcome distrust and hostility born of ignorance. British Government Ministers and Officials meet Jewish community representatives regularly. Our Police have regular contact with the NGO, Community Security Trust, which compiles information on anti-Semitic activity.

This Government has also strengthened both the legal framework against race discrimination and increased the criminal penalties for offences such as

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incitement to racial hatred and for racially or religiously aggravated assault, criminal damage and harassment. For instance, the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 raised the maximum penalty for inciting racial hatred from 2 to 7 years' imprisonment. This hefty increase - and one high profile conviction under it for anti-Jewish hate speech - shows how seriously we take such offences.

We all have a responsibility to tackle these incidents together, within communities, and with other states. It is important that anti-Semitism is not only fought by Jews just as for example Islamophobia is not only fought by Muslims. Inter community dialogue is an important element in tackling anti-Semitism and condemning violence/terrorism. The UK has had a Council of Christians and Jews promoting dialogue since 1942. The UK government is committed to assisting such dialogue. For instance, we are proud to be involved in the launch of the Alif - Aleph Manifesto in June. This Manifesto will provide a basis for facilitating relations between Jews and Muslims. It will help forge contacts between communities, and it will complement the UK's Community Cohesion policy.

We also believe in education and awareness raising as a means to tackle intolerance. In the UK we held our first national Holocaust Memorial Day in 2001- a demonstration of our continuing commitment to raise awareness and understanding of the Holocaust as an issue for new generations.

The UK would like to stress that it is important that all sources of anti-Semitism are tracked down and dealt with. Governments have a responsibility to find ways to act, whether through legislation or industry voluntary codes of conduct. That includes clamping down on hate propaganda, stopping the outpourings of neo-Nazi websites in the US, the circulation of anti-Semitic printed material in Russia, and broadcasts from and educational material in some Middle East countries

The UK welcomes work of multilateral organisations and bodies like the EU Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia in the sphere of intolerance.

The UK Government welcomes the EU Monitoring Centre's thorough recent report on anti-Semitism in the EU, and note its recommendations in the areas of legislation, monitoring, education and promotion of dialogue. We believe that we have a strong track record in each of the key areas identified and will continue with our comprehensive approach to tackling all forms of racism and discrimination.

I would like to conclude by making some recommendations. Firstly, that in its work against anti-Semitism and all other forms of intolerance, the OSCE embraces, promotes and even facilitates dialogue between different faith groups and race communities as a key means of tackling these problems. Secondly, that fellow OSCE states join the UK in implementing strong anti-racism legislation. Third, that all OSCE states assess the problems of anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance in their own countries as frankly as the EU Monitoring Centre has done in the European Union, and see whether

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the EUMC's recommendations are relevant to them. And finally that fellow OSCE states condemn anti-Semitism with one voice, through Solomon Passy's declaration concluding this conference, and implement the decision which he will include in it.