



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Anti-Semitism and the Media

As drafted for delivery by Mr. Sander Gerber
to the Cordoba Conference on Anti-Semitism
and on Other Forms of Intolerance
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Thank you Mr. Chairman.

It is a great honor for me to represent my country, the United States of America, at this significant conference. I applaud the government of Spain and His Majesty, King Juan Carlos I, for hosting us in the historic city of Cordoba. I commend the OSCE for undertaking a separate effort to contain and to eliminate anti-Semitism. OSCE's very reason for being provides it with a platform from which to combat anti-Semitism, as well as racism, discrimination and intolerance.

The Internet has provided a conduit for the dissemination of vast amounts of information to aid in this effort. People throughout the world are now able to access that information quickly and easily. Much of it serves a very positive purpose, among other things to counter anti-Semitism. Unfortunately, it can also serve the purpose of those who wish to continue to pervey hatred. The OSCE conference in Paris last year addressed this issue in detail. There is a careful balance to be maintained between the right to free expression and the need to protect all of us from hate material. We in the United States recognize our responsibility in this area and are working on this issue within the provisions of our Constitution and U.S. law.

Anti-Semitism is an ancient hatred based upon rumor, fabrications, and falsehoods. Current attacks are sometimes violent, but often much more subtle, hiding under the veil of political criticism of Israel. Valid criticism of the Government of Israel or its policies is not a sign of anti-Semitism; however, unfair and inaccurate depictions and reporting often cross the line.

As the State Department's Global Anti-Semitism Report explains, criticism of concrete policies of the State of Israel *can be* legitimate. However, the sweeping demonization and vilification of Israel and Israeli politicians, sometimes through comparisons with Nazi leaders, and through the use of Nazi symbols that caricature them, indicates an anti-Semitic bias, rather than a valid criticism of policies concerning controversial issues

Through a strange twist of history, the Jews who were victims of the Nazi killing machine are sometimes now portrayed in political cartoons, films and literature as themselves continuing the Nazi legacy of genocide. This is unwarranted and unacceptable, as all racist stereotypes are.

Generally, in free democracies, an individual will form an opinion based on what he or she has seen and heard in the media. That presents a special challenge to the media to provide its audience with material that can serve as the basis for an informed opinion. The power of the media is such that slanted reporting can have an enormous impact on public opinion. Witness the 2003 Eurobarometer poll of EC citizens that placed Israel ahead of Iran and North Korea as a threat to world peace. When media criticism is so one-sided and exaggerated that it distorts the truth and feeds anti-Semitism.

There are several NGOs that monitor and assist journalists to ensure accuracy of Middle East reporting. We often hear that the solution to “bad speech” is “good speech.” However, an individual often does not feel empowered to speak out, and a lone voice is not heard. There are NGOs who enable aggregates of public opinion to speak out.

For example, the NGO, *Honest Reporting*, offers a grassroots collection of 120,000 readers who are committed to drawing attention to unbalanced stories a platform to speak. When a reader notes a particular case or general pattern of overt anti-Semitism, the editors either privately contact the authors, or draft a pointed critique of the item and send the critique via email to 120,000 readers worldwide. Readers can use this critique as a basis for their own personal comments to the media outlet in question, thus encouraging journalists to become more balanced. For example, the London Times website had a photo of a woman wearing a headband emblazoned, “KILL JEWS.” The photo was captioned simply: “A university student protests against the war in Iraq.” After several letters, the Times apologized and corrected the caption.

The Middle East Research Institute (MEMRI) monitors translations of Arabic press and provides translation of hate speech to proper authorities.

The Anti-Defamation League publishes an educational guide for journalists that provides context for the Israel-Palestinian relationship and answers common false accusations. This publication helps reporters to understand issues that are often misrepresented.

Israel21c is an NGO that allows reporters to see beyond the conflict and to understand that Israeli society is based upon Western values of democracy and multi-culturalism.

The Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA) provides in-depth analyses of selected media pieces to expose and correct falsehoods and to educate editors and journalists to prevent such shoddy reporting in the first place.

As President Bush noted, “defending freedom also means disrupting the evil of anti-Semitism.” Particularly at this time, as the world of freedom expands, we must have a media which seeks truth and accuracy, and possesses a moral clarity. As oppressed societies learn to develop political debate, the OSCE must provide an example of how to balance respect for opposition, while protecting freedom of expression or information. With that in mind, I put forth four recommendations:

OSCE participating States should encourage their national media to provide balanced reporting and should condemn anti-Semitic slants.

OSCE might provide training for journalists, filmmakers, and NGOs that promotes balanced reporting on Israel and Jewish issues.

The ODIHR or the Office of the Representative for Freedom of the Media could hold expert meetings with Internet Service Providers, editors, news and film producers emphasizing the need for balanced portrayals of Israel.

Political and religious leaders in OSCE participating States should also follow the Vatican's lead by clearly and publicly condemning "anti-Zionism as a more recent manifestation of anti-Semitism."

Thank you.