

The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

**STATEMENT BY MARGHERITA BONIVER,  
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ITALY, AT THE OSCE CONFERENCE ON ANTI-SEMITISM**

Berlin, 28–29 April 2004

Mr. Chairman,

Mr. Cowen, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland, has already taken the floor on behalf of the European Union; his remarks fully reflect the position of my country. I shall therefore limit myself to a few comments from our national viewpoint.

This second Conference on Anti-Semitism confirms the crucial role of our Organization as a political forum representing a vast geographical area consisting of countries that are united in a declared commitment to common values.

The phenomenon of anti-Semitism has existed in many parts of Europe throughout its history. After the tragedy of the Holocaust, it was hoped that the phenomenon was finally banished forever, with only the memory remaining as a warning to be passed on to future generations. Unfortunately, we were over-optimistic: recent years have seen a worrying re-emergence of manifestations of hostility towards the Jewish people, together with an odious attempt to minimize, or even deny, the shameful events of recent European history. The President of the Italian Republic pointed out some days ago that “peoples that have no memory of their past are not masters of their future”. This is particularly true in the case of the Holocaust: to forget the past means to run the risk that coming generations may again have to face the tragedies of ethnic cleansing, if not even of genocide.

In more recent history, moreover, we see anti-Semitism becoming a disturbing factor in the Middle East crisis, serving as an additional blunt weapon against the State of Israel. It must be made absolutely clear in this connection that, whereas criticism is legitimate, it is not acceptable that a political campaign should try to gain support through the revival of racist concepts, irrationally demonizing a people, a culture or a religion. History teaches that ideologies based on racism are a danger for democracy and for peace itself, and it is therefore illusory, apart from being wrong, to try to link them to a social or institutional programme that is intended to be just and an expression of solidarity.

The younger generations seem particularly defenceless in the face of this pernicious trend: schools have not done all that they should have done to keep alive the memory of the Shoah. Whereas, following the Second World War, the vivid memories of these horrors helped to create a climate of unconditional solidarity with the Jewish communities and absolute social condemnation of all forms of anti-Semitism, a gradual relaxation of vigilance

has become apparent with the passage of time, with the result that unexpected opportunities have opened up for those who wish to call history into question or exploit the latent vestiges of anti-Semitism for political ends.

What we can now see — and, more seriously, what our children can now see — on the Internet, for example, is the disconcerting result of our negligence. It is therefore a matter of urgency that we reverse the trend and place at the disposal of the new generations the necessary instruments to defend themselves from this danger. I am certain that this Conference will make an important contribution in this regard, and I should like to thank the German Government for having hosted it and organized it so efficiently.

The Italian Parliament, without distinction as to party, has recently approved a number of guidelines urging the Government and the public administration to strengthen efforts to prevent and combat anti-Semitism in my country, beginning in the schools. We are aiming, in fact, to develop an understanding of the phenomenon of anti-Semitism and of the history of the Holocaust, together with an awareness of the important contribution made by Italian Jews to our national history, from the struggle against fascism to the formation of the Republic.

Among the initiatives already taken, I wish to mention the recent establishment of an Inter-Ministerial Committee against Discrimination and Anti-Semitism for the purpose of co-ordinating and further stimulating government efforts in this area. It is in this same spirit that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Anti-Defamation League are organizing a Conference on Anti-Semitism in Rome on 30 June and 1 July 2004. The Conference will take the form of round tables, with participants including Nobel laureates and other illustrious personalities who have distinguished themselves in the dialogue between religions and cultures.

Finally, I should like to mention the important work being done by the International Task Force for Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, an organization that is fully supported by the Italian Government and will be chaired this year by Italy.

I am confident that Europe, which is about to welcome ten new members to its institutions, thus fulfilling the dream of a continent reunited around shared democratic values and open to peaceful dialogue with its neighbours, will be in a position to confront the danger of a revival of anti-Semitism and of any other aberration of a racist nature, aware that combating this scourge is the same thing as defending our own freedom.

Italy itself feels the heavy burden of the memory of a past that is now distant but not for that reason any less painful. Internal political events led Italy to contradict a tradition of tolerance dating back to ancient times. This is another reason why we are anxious today to be on the front line in the struggle against any re-emergence of intolerance, to ensure that all manifestations of anti-Semitism and racism are condemned and outlawed and that the horrors that we witnessed in the past may never again be repeated.