



2020 K Street, NW, Suite 7800
Washington, DC 20006-1835
202.898.2500
202.898.0822 fax
ncsj@ncsj.org
www.ncsj.org

**Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia,
Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia**

PC.NGO/2/10
27 June 2010

ENGLISH only

**Statement
by Lesley Weiss**

**Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs for NCSJ: Advocates on behalf of
Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia**

At the OSCE High-Level Conference On Tolerance and Non- Discrimination
Astana, Kazakhstan – June 29-30, 2010

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am Lesley Weiss, Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs for *NCSJ: Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia*. NCSJ represents the organized American Jewish community on issues affecting the Jewish minority in the former Soviet Union. An umbrella organization that includes nearly 50 national American Jewish organizations and over 300 local community groups, it includes a number of those working and partnering with OSCE.

This year marks the 35th anniversary of the signing of the historic Helsinki Final Act. NCSJ was one of the first NGOs to ratify the accords and was one of the leaders in establishing the U.S. Helsinki Commission. The Helsinki Accords have been vital in resolving many concerns in the Jewish community, from freedom of immigration to combating anti-Semitism.

This intervention focuses on the key role governments play in responding to anti-Semitic and hate-motivated crimes. NCSJ has worked very closely on this important issue with parliamentarians, officials and organizations in the United States, Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Much has been accomplished in combating anti-Semitism across the former Soviet Union since the first OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism held ten years ago in Vienna. We want to

recognize the very real efforts and achievements of governments among the Soviet successor states in recognizing the problem and taking concrete actions to address it. However, much more needs to be done, especially in the key area of formulating a more systematic approach to combating anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance.

Manifestations of anti-Semitism in the Region rose in 2009 due to the harsh impact of the global economic crisis which resulted in economic and political instability and rising nationalism among disaffected youth. The most commonly reported expression of anti-Semitism remained attacks on property, especially vandalism of synagogues and other communal buildings, cemeteries, and Holocaust memorial sites, as well as the distribution of anti-Semitic materials in print and online. Online hate speech targeting Jews grew more common in electronic chat rooms, blogs, and discussion boards. Physical attacks and assaults on Jews also took place in the Region, but were less common.

State sanctioned anti-Semitism was rare in 2009, due to favorable relations between these governments and their local Jewish communities and because governments openly condemned anti-Semitic acts when they occurred. However, some officials and other public figures continued to make openly anti-Semitic public comments. The most disturbing rise in anti-Semitism occurred in Ukraine, which saw a rise in the number of attacks by skinheads and neo-Nazis on Jews and other minorities. The Ukrainian government has failed to implement effective legislation to fight hate crimes, despite condemning anti-Semitism at the highest levels. Similarly the Lithuanian government has investigated elderly Jewish anti-Nazi partisans for alleged crimes, but has been slow to act against indigenous hate groups and Nazi war criminals. Both the Ukrainian and Lithuanian governments have also failed to enact legislation to enable restitution of Jewish communal property to their native Jewish communities, in contrast to other states in Central and Eastern Europe.

Both violent and non-violent anti-Semitic incidents continue across Russia. Extremists continue to attack identifiably Jewish men and women in Moscow and elsewhere, often without legal consequence. The continued rise of ultranationalist groups is a troubling phenomenon, as is the Russian government's inconsistent prosecution of hate crimes committed by these groups.

We call on governments in the former Soviet space to promote a comprehensive, across-the-board strategy to combat anti-Semitism, one that incorporates close cooperation with national law enforcement and education officials, media institutions, and civil society representatives in countries of concern.

We believe that today, more than 20 years after the fall of the Soviet Union, governments and civil societies in the FSU are ready to move to a higher level in meeting this challenge, by addressing comprehensively and strategically the root causes of anti-Semitism in this dynamic region.

We encourage the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Lithuania, and other Soviet successor states to build on these efforts by undertaking a sustained campaign to counteract the actions and voices of hate and intolerance. This campaign must be waged through the coordinated implementation of legislation, law enforcement, and education. Only a ‘zero tolerance’ approach to anti-Semitism, as well as racism and xenophobia in general, will set the countries of the former Soviet Union on a path to a society freed from hatred and ethnic strife.

The OSCE, in its effort to fight the use and proliferation of global anti-Semitism, can serve its member agencies well through ODIHR and the Special Representative on Anti-Semitism. NCSJ and its member agencies will continue to work with the OSCE and with governments across the former Soviet Union to combat the alarming rise of global anti-Semitism. Only through a joint effort to provide the public with reliable information, consistent monitoring, and effective education and training, can the threat of anti-Semitism be alleviated. We urge the continuation of the OSCE Personal Representative of the Chair-in-Office for Combating Anti-Semitism.