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Global Trends in Anti-Semitism

Remarks

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Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to come before a group which is dedicated to combating anti-Semitism, promoting democratic values, and standing up for fair treatment for the State of Israel -- and which has done such great work toward those ends for many years.

It has been four years since the President went to Cairo to speak out against intolerance as a global ill. Much has happened since that time. Old authoritarian regimes which preached fear and hate have fallen. But the damage they have done to the world view of their own people lives on -- and it complicates the efforts of democrats in those societies to build national cultures that are tolerant and democratic.

The popular rejection of the old regimes presents the United States with both an opportunity and a challenge. We can and must support efforts to combat hate and promote tolerance in our world. As President Obama put it this January, "peace in our time requires the constant advance of those principles that our common creed describes: tolerance and opportunity; human dignity and justice." Our new Secretary of State, Secretary Kerry, echoed these values during his overseas trip to visit leaders in Europe and the Middle East, when he spoke of the "urgent need to promote a spirit of tolerance." But while our goals are clear, so are the obstacles. It will take patience and persistence to achieve the ends we seek.

We are attempting -- through diplomacy, public messaging and programs all over the world -- to advance those principles. Our strategy is to confront and combat hatred in all its ugly forms -- whether it is hatred directed against people on account of their religion, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation or differences of political opinion or due to their country of origin. Anti-Semitism is a widespread form of such hatred. If we want to change these trends, we need to stand together in our efforts to promote tolerance, acceptance and compassion.

Unfortunately, anti-Semitism is not history -- it is news. More than six decades after the end of the Second World War, anti-Semitism is alive and well. Centuries-old stereotypes and myths are conflated with current events to inject new life into the stale prejudices of the past. In many cases, myths and misinformation about Israel were indoctrinated into the minds of people by authoritarian regimes desperately seeking a pretext to remain in power. The myths and misinformation have outlived the regimes that propagated them. Undoing the damage that has been done doubtless will be the work of generations. But the enormity of the task only underscores its urgency.

The trends are deeply troubling.

"Old fashioned" anti-Semitism is instilling fear where there should be freedom and draining Jewish communities of resources they can ill afford. We are all too familiar with ongoing hostile acts such as the defacing of property and the desecration of cemeteries with anti-Semitic graffiti. Old slanders are recycled, such as when a Hungarian Member of Parliament from the Jobbik party recently made reference to a long-discredited accusation of blood libel from 1882.

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Venezuela's late President Hugo Chavez during his last campaign used government-sponsored media outlets to publish anti-Semitic articles as a means of attacking his opponent's Jewish ancestry.

Conspiracy theories continue to flourish in the Middle East. These include supposed Jewish control of the U.S. media and the world banking system, and claims that Jews were involved in executing the September 11 attacks.

Last summer, Iranian Vice President Rahimi at an anti-drug conference blamed the Talmud for the spread of illegal drugs. In France, the Jewish Community Security Service has called 2012 "a year of unprecedented violence against Jews." In the United Kingdom, the Community Security Trust reported 2012 to be "the third worst year on record." In our own country, almost two-thirds of hate crimes committed each year on the basis of religion or belief are committed against Jews. Even the smallest Jewish communities, such as the 1000 Jews of Melilla -- a Spanish enclave on the North African coast -- are forced to spend a disproportionate amount of their budgets on maintaining their members' physical security.

Those communities cannot but believe their fear is justified when they go to their parliament and see their representatives reading aloud "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion"-- as a Golden Dawn Member of Parliament did in Greece last year. Or when they hear their politicians call for a list of Jews to be collected because they pose a "security risk" to their home country -- as a representative of Jobbik did in Hungary recently. Or when they turn on the TV and hear their president praying for the destruction of the Jewish homeland or calling Jews descendants of apes and pigs -- as happened in Egypt. They cannot feel safe when they hear their people accused of crimes they could never have committed, when Iranian officials blamed Jews for the massacre of Muslims in Burma.

Some threats to a Jewish way of life may be motivated by genuine but misplaced concern about children's rights, such as efforts to outlaw or severely restrict the ritual practices of circumcision. Interestingly, these restrictions affect Muslim communities as well, and we saw in Germany alliances develop between Jews and Muslims to preserve their religious traditions.

Nationalistic movements target immigrants, and religious and ethnic minorities -- in the name of protecting the identity and 'purity' of their nation. In Greece, Golden Dawn won almost 7% of the vote. It has targeted persons perceived to be illegal migrants in attacks, in addition to demeaning Jews. In Hungary, spokespersons from the Jobbik party have accused the Jewish community of inflating the number of Holocaust victims to gain political favor and attack opponents with uniformed storm troopers. Today, Jobbik holds 12% of the seats in the Hungarian parliament.

Holocaust denial has been espoused not just by Iranian President Ahmadinejad, but also by religious leaders, such as discredited Catholic Bishop Richard Williamson. Some extremists go so far as to engage in Holocaust glorification, such as when a member of Greece's Golden Dawn party said of immigrants, "We are ready to reheat the ovens" and "make lamps from their skin."

Similarly, a troubling trend is the persistent tendency of blurring the lines between opposition to the policies of the State of Israel and anti-Semitism. This happens easily and often, especially in Europe, where people are genuinely concerned about the plight of the Palestinians. I want to be clear -- criticism of policies of the State of Israel is not anti-Semitism. But when criticism of Israeli policy includes assumptions that Zionism is an ideology of religious or ethnic superiority, or that Israel is immunized from international criticism because Jews control the media or the banking system, then the speakers -- sometimes quite unconsciously -- are promoting the same old anti-Semitic attitudes that were around for centuries before the current State of Israel was founded. Bodies like the UN Human Rights Council perpetuate an approach that devotes an entire agenda item to human rights violations allegedly committed by Israel while every other country in the world is lumped together in a single item. It is impossible to divine a legitimate premise for such action.

This kind of rhetoric is not without consequence. We record increases in anti-Semitic violence whenever there are hostilities in the Middle East. Every day, the State Department is monitoring these trends and activities, and making sure that the U.S. will be there to step forward when needed. We report on those trends, in all 199 countries and territories, in two major annual reports: The International Religious Freedom Report and the Human Rights Report.

And we take action. Here in Washington, we inform and educate State Department employees working on a wide variety of issues and who are engaging with leaders from every one of those countries. We regularly deliver training modules on anti-Semitism at the Foreign Service Institute. Our embassies around the world have a standing tasking to make sure we're informed about anti-Semitic incidents as they happen. They also are charged with knowing who to engage to promote tolerance. Their mission is to ensure that a trend against discrimination and violence does not gain momentum. We here in Washington deliver parallel messages to foreign diplomats and use our religious engagement to reinforce the message.

Our effort is not to simply criticize, though we are not shy about doing so when warranted. Rather, our job is to make a difference. In some countries, simply pointing out that a criticism of Israel contains anti-Semitic assumptions may change

the way public figures put forward their position. In other places, the culture of anti-Semitism is so strong that public figures are reluctant to speak out even when they are personally persuaded that the common wisdom – or lack thereof – is wrong. In these cases, we need to work with local actors to identify concrete steps that will make a real change over time, rather than a headline for a day.

In this regard, my friend Hannah Rosenthal personally travelled to over 30 countries during her tenure as Special Envoy. She had significant success in getting senior officials to speak out and condemn the Holocaust -- in changing the way educational systems incorporate lessons about the Holocaust into curriculum -- and, most importantly, in helping empower local actors to prevent, combat and prosecute hate crimes and promote tolerance and respect.

And it is not all talk. Hannah and the Special Representative to Muslim Communities, Farah Pandith, put in place a program called "Hours Against Hate." It encouraged young people to work together across the lines of religion and tradition on projects that benefitted both Jewish and non-Jewish communities. It became an official tolerance campaign for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. We currently have made roughly \$300,000 available in grants solely for programs addressing intolerance and anti-Semitism. This assures that places where anti-Semitism is at its most virulent can have access to programs that promote tolerance and mutual understanding over hate.

I don't want you to think that the picture is all bleak. There has been good news as well as bad. Last year, the Norwegian government publicly apologized for the role of Norwegian authorities in deporting Jews during World War II. The Belgian Senate passed a resolution in January recognizing the role of Belgian authorities in the Holocaust and indicating a desire to include Holocaust education in Belgium's curricula. Last October, Ukraine celebrated the opening of the Menorah Jewish Community Center and Holocaust Museum. Here at the Department of State, we have hosted multiple events, including commemorating the survivors of the MS St. Louis. This past January, our International Holocaust Memorial Day program paid tribute to victims of the "Holocaust by Bullets," which took place in Eastern Europe during World War II – a horror with which I became familiar during my tour of duty in Belarus.

And even the United Nations has seen some progress. The number of annual anti-Israel resolutions in the Human Rights Council dropped from 2007 to 2012, though much work in Geneva remains.

After all, since the beginning of humankind, hate has been around. But since then too, good people of all faiths and backgrounds have striven to combat it. It is our mission to confront those who practice hate and to engage and strengthen those who promote tolerance.

Where there is hatred born of ignorance, we must teach and inspire. Where there is hatred born of blindness, we must expose people to a larger world of ideas. We must reach out, especially to youth, so they can see beyond their immediate circumstances. Where there is hatred whipped up by irresponsible leaders, we must call them out and answer as strongly as we can – and make their message totally unacceptable to all people of conscience.

It has been my privilege to contribute to these efforts on an interim basis. I look forward to supporting the efforts of our next Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism as soon as he or she enters office. And I thank all of you for what you do every day to this end.

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