

Testimony of Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues Edward B. O'Donnell, Jr.
Before the Senate Subcommittee on European Affairs
“Anti-Semitism in Europe”
October 22, 2003

Introduction

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to address the European Affairs Subcommittee on “Anti-Semitism in Europe.” As the new Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, with less than one month on the job, I would like to express in this, my first public statement, my sincere appreciation to President Bush and Secretary Powell for having selected me for this position. I have been involved in various capacities with Holocaust issues during my career as a Foreign Service Officer. Like my predecessors in this position, I am honored to be able to assist in bringing a measure of justice to Holocaust victims and their families. Professionally and personally, I also commit to doing my utmost to contribute to fighting anti-Semitism in Europe.

This hearing is an important part of the joint effort between Congress and the Administration to call attention to the problem of anti-Semitism and to seek practical solutions, working together with the Europeans who also are deeply troubled by incidents of anti-Semitism throughout Europe. The United States is involved because of our enduring commitment to respect for all religions; and we also care deeply because we are not immune in our own country from hate crimes and intolerance.

My objective in this testimony is to state U.S. Administration policy, describe what we are doing with our neighbors across the Atlantic, and outline several areas where we are working on practical steps to combat anti-Semitism. We have made progress in the past year and can be pleased that it appears there has been some decrease in anti-Semitic acts that surged in parts of Europe in 2002. This does not mean that we can relax and direct our energies elsewhere. Every incident of hate-related crime is tragic and should be denounced, be it graffiti on a cemetery headstone, an arson attack on a synagogue or a physical attack against an individual. There is still much work to be done. We need to develop creative approaches to enhancing respect for all persons and religions, to promoting understanding towards Jewish communities in Europe, and , in a broader sense, to supporting our goal in the War on Terrorism of countering religious extremism and intolerance which lead to hatred and violence.

U.S. Policy

During President Bush’s visit to Auschwitz on May 31 this year he said: “This site is a sobering reminder that when we find anti-Semitism, whether it be in Europe or anywhere else, mankind must come together to fight such dark impulses.” The U.S. Government firmly believes that anti-Semitism is an insidious and continuing phenomenon that undermines basic values of democracy—tolerance, mutual understanding and individual rights and freedoms.

The Administration fully supports the October 14, 2003 statement to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw by Representative Christopher H. Smith.

He said, "The United States also calls for Ministerial language urging all elected leaders and government authorities to denounce acts of anti-Semitism when they occur, as well as seek vigorous investigations and prosecutions. While strong law enforcement is needed, education of youth is equally important."

Cooperation with European Allies

The U.S. has played a strong leadership role in urging the OSCE to focus on the threat anti-Semitism presents and to develop practical measures to combat it. Political momentum and a renewed awareness regarding anti-Semitism have been created. Former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani led the U.S. Delegation to the June 2003 OSCE Anti-Semitism Conference in Vienna. The delegation included representatives from the Administration, Congress and NGOs. Mayor Giuliani and others presented concrete U.S. suggestions including:

- Compile and regularly evaluate hate crime statistics in a uniform fashion.
- Encourage all participating states to pass hate-related criminal legislation.
- Set up educational programs in participating states about anti-Semitism.
- Remember the Holocaust accurately and resist Holocaust revisionists.

The June meeting demonstrated that the OSCE could mobilize for what will be a long-term, sustained effort to combat anti-Semitism. The U.S. Administration undertook a major, successful, political push to build consensus for this meeting. The Vienna meeting recognized anti-Semitism as a human rights issue for the first time and significantly raised awareness of this continuing serious problem.

Since June, the U.S. has remained active. On October 14 in Warsaw at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation meeting, Europe's largest meeting on human rights and democratization, the U.S. delegation pushed hard for the OSCE to turn the U.S. June recommendations into concrete strategies for dealing with anti-Semitism. What did we achieve? Importantly, with the European Union, we won support to hold a follow-on conference on anti-Semitism, in Berlin at the end of April 2004. We now need to build OSCE-wide consensus for a formal decision by the OSCE foreign ministers when they meet in Maastricht in December. At the Berlin meeting, our goal will be for the OSCE to adopt concrete measures for combating anti-Semitism as a fully integrated part of its work, including through the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. We will also seek further concrete progress toward the collection and analysis of hate crime statistics and a recommendation for OSCE countries to ensure that their education systems accurately teach about the Holocaust.

In other European organizations there has been progress as well. The Council of Europe agreed in October 2002 on several steps concerning the Holocaust, including in the area of Holocaust education, and member-countries agreed to observe an annual Holocaust Remembrance Day during which education about the Holocaust plays an increasingly important role. In 2003, the EU extended its European Racism and Xenophobia Network to include the ten candidate countries.

U.S. embassies and consulates in Europe have been very active bilaterally. Ambassadors speak out publicly against anti-Semitism and encourage prompt law enforcement action by host nations against criminal conduct. Our diplomatic officials know local Jewish community leaders, and work through the local governments to monitor incidents and express our concern. These diplomatic activities are detailed for the Congress in the 2002 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, and in annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. Moreover, public affairs sections in U.S. embassies in Europe implement important programs to foster religious respect and to counter anti-Semitism.

Education

The Administration's efforts to prevent future anti-Semitism in Europe center on programs to educate the next generation of Europeans about the truth of the Holocaust and the lessons from history of the importance of religious tolerance and respect. Secretary Powell, in April 30, 2003 remarks in the Capitol Rotunda, said "teaching new generations about the Holocaust ... is an affirmation of our common humanity."

The Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research was formed at the initiative of Sweden, with two other founding members, the United Kingdom and the United States. The Task Force's mission is to further Holocaust education, remembrance and research. Today, this important Holocaust forum includes 15 member-countries with participation by important NGOs such as the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and Yad Vashem. In addition, there are eight liaison countries, and the Task Force is expanding to include new countries. Task Force members commit to the Principles of the Stockholm Declaration to include: assuming responsibility for understanding causes of the Holocaust; pledging to promote education, remembrance and research; opening archives; and observing an annual Holocaust remembrance day. Currently, the U.S. is in the chair of the Task Force and will hold a plenary meeting in Washington at the beginning of December that delegations from more than 18 countries and 120 persons will attend. This follows a similar meeting we hosted at the State Department last May.

While projects the Task Force finances are small in cost their impact is large, with a priority on teacher training to engage the intellectual curiosity of students. So far this year 27 projects for 11 countries, averaging about 13,500 dollars each, have been approved from a budget of less than 300 thousand dollars. Since 2000, 60 percent of the budget for the Task Force's four working groups has gone to Holocaust education or a total of about 400 thousand dollars within the last three years. In addition to teacher training, types of projects included: visits to concentration/extermination camps; funds for historical commissions to document the Holocaust; documentary film projects about the Holocaust; and translations of scholarly books and articles.

To give you a picture of the impact of the work of the Task Force, I would like to quote a recent letter from a Romanian teacher: "The visit to the concentration camp of Auschwitz was the most emotive experience of my life. When I returned to my school in Romania, I told the students of the visit and the Holocaust. The students were completely

silent. One girl asked: 'How could this happen in the 20th Century?' In fact, a few days later, a parent asked me for information to read about the Holocaust.”

Also important for the younger generation in Europe is the “Future Fund” of the German Foundation "Responsibility, Remembrance and the Future." The Foundation was established primarily to provide some measure of justice to former slave and forced laborers, but one element of it, the Future Fund, has a more forward looking goal. Of approximately five billion dollars administered by the Foundation, 350 million dollars is allocated for specific projects. Some of these are expected to include Holocaust education, tolerance, social justice and international cooperation in humanitarian endeavors. Currently funded projects include: textbook writing; video interviews with eyewitnesses; and scholarly projects. One particularly important activity supports face-to-face meetings between survivors and young people, and in some cases young people even assist elderly survivors with their shopping and other daily activities.

The U.S. Government also funds Holocaust Awareness Grants through the SEED Democracy Commission. Eleven grants to the Baltic countries totaling over 100,000 dollars support the development of textbooks and other materials for teachers, and provide other resources on the Holocaust. Three grants to Russia totaling 43,000 dollars finance 20 seminars for teachers and young people; the production and distribution of brochures about the dangers of spreading neo-Nazi and racist views; and a manual for history teachers.

The Future

Our strategy for the future in Europe is to work intensively, both bilaterally and through multilateral institutions such as the OSCE, to develop effective, practical ways to combat anti-Semitism, and in particular anti-Semitic violence. Our work is not done. The first goal to make sure the planned Berlin anti-Semitism conference is approved at the OSCE ministerial in December, and is a success in April resulting in the adoption of concrete measures such as a centralized OSCE database to monitor anti-Semitic incidents. Through our embassies and in other fora we will seek to keep anti-Semitism at the forefront of attention of governments and the people of Europe. We also will continue our vigorous efforts to promote Holocaust education through the work of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, the Future Fund of the German Foundation, and bilateral U.S. programs. We will continue to cooperate closely with Congress, the U.S. Helsinki Commission and non-governmental organizations, all of which play important roles in focusing public attention on anti-Semitism in Europe, and in developing creative, effective and forceful approaches to prevent it.

Let me again thank you for the invitation to review the Administration’s activities in combating anti-Semitism, and what we have achieved and what we plan for the future. I look forward to your questions.