

**Statement of the Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin, Co-Chairman
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

“Taking Stock: Combating Anti-Semitism in the OSCE Region”

January 29, 2008

Welcome to the first in a series of Commission hearings focused on reviewing efforts to monitor and combat anti-Semitism throughout the OSCE region. A second hearing will take place on February 7, at 2:30 pm. We hope that you will join us.

I would first like to extend a special welcome to my friend and former Commissioner Senator Voinovich, whose leadership has been instrumental in global efforts to combat anti-Semitism.

As many of you know, the largest of the web of Nazi concentration and extermination camps, Auschwitz-Birkenau (BIR-KEN-NOW), was liberated this week in 1945 on January 27. The horror found there exemplified the very worst of humanity and what can take place when unbridled hate is allowed to flourish.

For 26 OSCE participating States, January 27th has now been reserved as a day of remembrance. In the U.S., our own day of remembrance will take place in May. However, this week, we too, will honor the memory of those who perished during the Holocaust by reviewing where we are in the struggle to eradicate the prejudices, discrimination, and outright violence that has plagued Jews for centuries, and continues to this very day.

I would like to thank Chairman Hastings for continuing to place this issue at the forefront of the Commission’s agenda and understand that commitments in Florida have prevented him from being here today. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to my friend and colleague in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Professor Gert Weisskirchen. Not only have you been a staunch leader within the Parliamentary Assembly on these issues but also within the German Bundestag. Welcome.

Now we turn to a focus on the status of efforts to address the escalation of violence in Europe and North America that marked anti-Semitic activity at the beginning of this decade.

According to the State Department, manifestations of anti-Semitism increased significantly in Europe since 2000, including verbal and physical attacks against Jews resulting in serious injury and even death, and also vandalism, fire bombings of Jewish schools, and desecration of synagogues and cemeteries.

It is within this context that I, along with Chairman Hastings, Ranking Member Smith, Senator Voinovich and other members of this Commission began efforts within the U.S. Congress and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to address this violence. With OSCE Parliamentarians such as Gert Weisskirchen and Canadian Senator Jerry Grafstein, we were able to unanimously adopt a resolution specifically focused on combating anti-Semitism, at the Assembly’s Berlin meeting in 2002.

Since that time, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has annually passed declarations addressing anti-Semitism and calling for concrete measures by all participating States and the OSCE. Most recently, I spearheaded efforts at the Assembly’s 2007 Annual Session in Kyiv

to focus on the implementation of these declarations, including requesting presentations from the three Personal Representatives at OSCE PA Annual Sessions and exploring the role Mediterranean Partner countries can play in combating all forms of intolerance, including anti-Semitism.

These parliamentary declarations have often served as the blueprint for many efforts within the OSCE, including the Vienna and Berlin conferences, collection of hate crimes data, and development of educational tools to counter anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. Initiatives aimed at providing the political impetus for action, including the valuable work undertaken by our guests here today.

Now despite these best efforts, the stereotypes and hateful sentiments directed toward Jewish communities around the globe remain and have remained at record levels in many countries since the beginning of this decade, but not without some signs of progress.

While many of us may be familiar with the headlines the Belarusian President made last year for his use of Jewish stereotypes, some may be less familiar with the efforts of a Polish Mayor who denounced anti-Semitism and participated in the clean up effort of hundreds of Jewish graves that had been desecrated.

With Senators in Romania castigating an ambassadorial nominee for his “Jewish heritage,” the words of the Hungarian parliamentarian Imre Mecs (Em-ray Mech) condemning the resurgent use of Holocaust-era symbols in his country may have also been missed.

Or, with neo-Nazis attempting to march through Prague’s Jewish quarter on the anniversary of Kristallnacht, the echo of footsteps of the British Parliamentarian, John Mann through the halls of the U.S. Congress may not have seemed as loud. As Chairman of the British Parliamentary Committee Against Anti-Semitism, John Mann not only combats anti-Semitic activity in his own country, but has also traveled to speak with other Parliamentarians about how they might undertake similar initiatives in their own countries.

While I understand that Mr. Mann could not be here today due to commitments within his own government, the example of the UK’s Inquiry exemplifies how political leaders in particular can use their positions to promote solidarity, tolerance and respect in their citizenry.

As the title spells out, today we seek to take stock of our successes and ongoing challenges. I am pleased that we have both Professor Weisskirchen and Dr. Kathrin Meyer here to speak about the wide range of initiatives that have taken place within the OSCE following our extensive efforts. While we regret that Dr. Meyer will be leaving the OSCE, we are glad that she will be continuing her efforts to combat anti-Semitism as the Executive Secretary of the Task Force for International cooperation on Holocaust Education, Research and Remembrance, which counts many OSCE countries amongst its membership.

Today I am eager to review how far we have come and how we should proceed in the future, noting what we have learned, as this is the only way we will successfully eradicate the negative sentiments and related violence directed towards Jewish and other communities.

Thank you.