

**Statement of the Honorable Alcee L. Hastings, Chairman
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

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

January 29, 2008

Welcome. It is appropriate that we convene a hearing on combating anti-Semitism in January as many of the darkest chapters of the *Shoah*, the Holocaust, were written during this month – including Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor in 1933, the banning of Jews from the German Labor Front trade union a year later, a ban on Jews in the teaching and other professions and sterilization orders of Afro-German youth followed in 1937, with the issuance of the order to speed up the forcible removal of Jews in 1939, and the fateful selection of Auschwitz as site for a new concentration camp in January of 1940.

The following year a leading Nazi newspaper proclaimed, “Now judgment has begun and it will reach its conclusion only when knowledge of the Jews has been erased from the earth.” By January of 1943 over one million Jews had been slaughtered and orders were issued for the arrest and deportation of all Roma to extermination camps.

Other January events demonstrated a valiant effort to resist this evil, most notably the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising that same year. At last, the liberation of Auschwitz came on January 27, 1945, but only after two million men, women, and children had perished there.

Out of the depths of destruction, death, and despair European Jewry survived and once again thrives across a continent which has, for the most part, embraced democratic principles of governance and respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted 60 years ago in the wake of World War II.

But the events of the early part of this new century were a vivid reminder that vigilance and action are necessary to prevent the resurgence of anti-Semitism and related violence in Europe and beyond, including in our own country. The Helsinki Commission responded to the disturbing rise in anti-Semitic violence at home and abroad, mobilizing Commissioners and others in partnership with the NGO community, to translate common concerns into action. In this regard, I note the strong leadership provided by Co-Chairman Ben Cardin, Chris Smith, and Senator Voinovich.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly proved an important vehicle for rallying parliamentarians throughout the OSCE region and building political support for action by the participating States. Professor Weisskirchen, a man of tremendous passion and energy, has proved a key ally in this ongoing struggle.

I had the privilege of participating in the first OSCE conference focused exclusively on anti-Semitism, convened in Vienna in 2003, and have participated in those held in Berlin, Cordoba, and most recently in Bucharest. Given the gravity of the issue - I

have pushed, and will continue to press to ensure that combating anti-Semitism in all its manifestations remains high on the agenda of the OSCE and the Parliamentary Assembly, with the special value added that parliamentarians and other elected officials can and must bring to bear in the face of this evil.

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.

Thank you both for being here today, I am looking forward to your testimonies.