



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on International Holocaust Remembrance Day

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 22, 2015

The United States welcomes to the Permanent Council Sir Andrew Burns, Chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, and Ambassador Roksanda Ninčić, State Secretary of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia and Head of Delegation of the Republic of Serbia to the Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, and thanks both of them for their presentations. We also thank the Serbian Chairmanship for dedicating this Permanent Council meeting to International Holocaust Remembrance Day, which on January 27 will commemorate the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Several permanent representatives joined me last fall at Auschwitz-Birkenau, where so many perished during the Holocaust. For those who made the visit, the evil that took place there was palpable. Most of those killed by the Nazis at Auschwitz-Birkenau, and at similar camps in Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe, were murdered because of their religion or race. Others were murdered because of their sexual orientation, political views, or disabilities. Some victims survived the camps and told us their stories so that we can bear witness to the horror they experienced and honor the pledge of “never again.” Very soon, there will be no survivors left to share their testimony. We and future generations will bear the responsibility of ensuring that the Holocaust is not denied or its history distorted. As Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi said, “Those who deny Auschwitz would be ready to remake it.”

While we remember this tragic chapter in our shared history, we cannot ignore the current challenges facing Europe. Holocaust survivors had hoped that after the terrible carnage of the 1930s and 1940s, anti-Semitism would never again take hold in Europe. Yet, today, anti-Semitic violence is occurring in Europe at a level not seen in decades. This includes the shooting at the Jewish Museum in Brussels last May, the anti-Semitic violence that occurred in a number of countries across Europe last summer and, most recently, the attack in Paris in a kosher grocery store. These attacks suggest that it is becoming more dangerous to be outwardly Jewish – to shop at a Jewish store, to send your children to a Jewish school, to mark your home as Jewish, or to wear religious items that identify you as Jewish.

We are grateful that in the aftermath of the terrible terrorist attacks in Paris, the three Chairmanship’s Personal Representatives on Tolerance traveled together to France to provide OSCE support for combatting anti-Semitism and to discuss with the French government ways to promote tolerance. We are also pleased that the Permanent Council adopted a declaration condemning the Paris attacks. I must add, however, that it was distressing to learn that some delegations attempted to remove the term anti-Semitism from the declaration. To fail to identify the attack on the kosher grocery store as an anti-Semitic one would be to deny once again that anti-Semitism exists.

According to the 2013 report on anti-Semitism by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, almost one third of European Jews surveyed have considered leaving Europe because they fear for their safety. If Jewish communities once again do not feel safe, what does this mean for European society? As Ambassador Samantha Power said in her remarks at the Berlin Conference on anti-Semitism last November: “The periods when we see alarming surges of anti-Semitism are often the same periods when we see an erosion of human rights in general, including the repression of members of other minority groups. When the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Jews are repressed, the rights and freedoms of other minorities are often not far behind.”

As we remember the Holocaust, we call on OSCE participating States to implement the Basel Ministerial Declaration on Combatting Anti-Semitism promptly and completely, and to support ODIHR fully in its efforts to fight all forms of intolerance.

Efforts to promote tolerance can make a difference. Hatred is not genetic - no one is born intolerant. Lassana Bathily, a Muslim immigrant, was working in the stock room of the kosher grocery store in Paris when the store was attacked. He protected more than a dozen customers by hiding them in the store’s cold storage room, while he escaped to tell the police. He then showed the police how to enter the store and ambush the gunman inside. When interviewed, Mr. Bathily said, “It’s nothing. It’s life.” Not the life of a Jew, or a Muslim, or a Christian, but a life.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.