

Chairman Russ Carnahan
Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight

Opening Statement
“Combating Anti-Semitism: Protecting Human Rights”

April 14, 2010

This past Sunday, April 11th, nearly 1,000 St. Louisans attended Brith Sholom Kneseth Israel Synagogue to commemorate Yom HaShoah, or Holocaust Remembrance Day. The event was hosted by the St. Louis Holocaust Museum and Learning Center.

After World War II, about 300 Holocaust survivors came to St. Louis. Today, fewer than 150 survivors remain. Each year, Yom HaShoah takes on more urgency, as fewer survivors are able to recount the terrible tragedies that they witnessed. While Holocaust survivors are still among us, we must strengthen efforts to speak out and combat Holocaust denial.

Today, we have with us Ms. Hannah Rosenthal, Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism. I understand that her father is also a Holocaust survivor. We are honored to have her here today to talk about the Obama Administration’s efforts to combat Holocaust denial and other forms of hateful, derogatory anti-Semitism.

Anti-Semitism is not just rhetoric; it is a violation of human rights. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed in 1948 under the Harry Truman Administration says, “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

The incidents of anti-Semitism are on the rise. According to Abraham Foxman, National Director of the Anti-Defamation League, 2009 was “probably the worst year of global anti-Semitism since the Second World War... there has been no country, no city, no continent that was not witness to anti-Semitic manifestations, and we do not talk about thousands and thousands of Web sites, millions upon millions of hits to reinforce people’s anti-Semitism.”

According to the Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Anti-Semitism and Racism at Tel Aviv University, violent attacks against Jews worldwide more than doubled last year. In 2009 there were 1,129 Anti-Semitic incidents; this figure, up from 559 incidents the previous year, is the highest since the study began more than 20 years ago.

I’d like to submit for the record a new report on rising anti-Semitism, just released for the hearing today, from the Pew Forum on Religion and Politics. Author Brian Grim notes that “Although the global Jewish population makes up approximately 0.2 percent of the world’s

population, governmental or societal harassment of Jews was reported in 55 countries (28 percent) during the two-year period under examination.”

Today, we will hear about efforts to combat anti-Semitism. I am interested in learning about the Obama Administration’s efforts to reduce anti-Semitism and the stigma and misconceptions about other faiths through inter-faith dialogue. I’d like to know what other measures our panelists recommend to more effectively enforce measures that combat anti-Semitism.

I would also like to hear more about the enforcement of laws to address Holocaust-era restitution issues. For example, the Government of Spain has refused to return a painting expropriated by the Nazis to the owners’ heirs, even though Spain is a signatory to the Terezin Declaration, affirming its commitment to return looted art. Likewise, Lithuania has yet to enact a law to return communal property, while Poland has yet to enact a law returning private property to Jewish owners.

We are also interested in hearing about efforts through international organizations to combat anti-Semitism, and what can be done through the United Nations, the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe, and other international organizations. Last May, the United States decided to join the UN Human Rights Council, reform it from within, and use its voice and vote to focus attention on the worst abusers of human rights and away from an excessive focus on Israel.

I am also particularly interested in learning about the status of anti-Semitism on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. These new media can be tools for liberation and freedom of expression, as we’ve seen in Iran and Venezuela, but they can also be tools to spread hateful, inciteful speech and dangerous ideas.

I will now introduce our first witness.