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Vice Chair Felice D. Gaer lead discussion about religious freedom in Russia.

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FELICE
GAER: Well, ladies and gentlemen, I want to welcome you to our briefing on "Russia: Religious Communities, Extremist Movements, and the State." My name is Felice Gaer and I'm the vice chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. I also direct the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights at the American Jewish Committee.

We at the commission would like to express our gratitude to the Kennan Institute for agreeing to cosponsor this even today, and we are focusing on current Russian government policies towards religion and extremist movements in that country. In light of the retreat from democracy in Russia and a view of the upcoming meeting between President Bush and President Putin later this month, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom believes that this briefing is both timely and important.

We have thus invited three leading experts to address various aspects of this issue, and before we turn to them I'd like to spend just a couple of minutes discussing long-standing commission concerns about religious intolerance and the status of religious freedom in Russia. These concerns were examined during the commission's visit to Russia in 2003 and were reflected in a report we issues in May of last year. I'm not sure if that report is in the packets outside.

MR. : This report?

MS. GAER: It is. Yeah, that's the one, and we encourage you to read it, comment on it, let us know what you think about it.

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom is an

independent U.S. government agency. It was established in 1998 under the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act. It monitors the status of freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief globally. The commission is not part of the State Department or the executive branch. We don't write the State Department reports; we comment on the State Department reports. We write our own reports. We make recommendations on policy to the president, secretary of state and the Congress, on ways in which the United States government can further protect and promote this freedom and the other freedoms that are interrelated with them.

The commission examines the status of religious freedom abroad as defined in such international instruments as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The practice of religion is freer than at any other time in Russian history. I think we'd all agree on that. But nonetheless, as our commission noted after our visit there in 2003 - and I quote - "most if not all religious freedom concerns appear to be directly related to the increasing influence of authoritarian and perhaps even chauvinistic strains in the Russian government," unquote.

In late January, just as President Putin was telling an international audience at the Auschwitz commemoration ceremonies that, "No one has a right to be indifferent to anti-Semitism, nationalism and racial and religious intolerance" - that's a quote of what he said - 19 members of the Russian state Duma called on the procurator general to ban all Jewish organizations for alleged incitement of religious and ethnic hatred. Even though the letter was later officially withdrawn, none of the signers have expressed regret for the hate-filled views they expressed in that letter.

In my capacity of both the Blaustein Institute and a vice chair of the U.S. Commission, I would conclude that the sharp deterioration of the human rights situation in Russia, and particularly the rise of xenophobia and anti-Semitism is of great concern and important for us all to focus in on.

Just when attacks on minorities and migrants in Moscow and other Russian cities have risen sharply in late January, the police chief of Moscow denied that there were any skinheads in that city, admitting only that "some rabble" attacked foreigners. The brutal decade-long war in Chechnya, for which President Putin has refused to seek a political solution, has claimed thousands of victims among civilians in Chechnya: Russian soldiers and members of Russia's Muslim minorities who are often automatically equated with terrorism. The war in Chechnya has

also spawned acts of terrorism in Moscow, as you all know, in Beslan and other areas.

The 1997 Religion Law, with its onerous registration requirements, in effect created a hierarchy of religious organizations, which generally meant that newer religions had fewer rights and privileges than the traditional - so-called traditionally established religions. Due to the law's vague and sometimes contradictory language, the registration process is open to abuse by government officials, particularly on the local level, and until recently, Russian court rulings eased some of the law's harsher registration requirements, yet in this last year, 2004, Russian courts upheld a ban on all activities of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Moscow. This unfortunate ban marks the first time that the 1997 law has been used to shut down the local branch of any nationally registered religious community. This does not bode well for the future.

Enforcement of the Religion Law gives grounds for concern and several proposed amendments are troubling. One amendment proposed that the Ministry of Justice would be allowed to require detailed documentation about a religious community's compliance with its bylaws, and in 2004, President Putin signed an executive order setting up a new national agency within the Ministry of Justice with just such powers, not only for religious communities, but also for nongovernmental organizations. It's still too early to determine the effect of this new oversight agency, but we clearly need to keep an eye on this.

Since February 2002, a draft bill known as the Law on Traditional Religions has been under consideration by committees in the state Duma. This proposed law would grant varying levels of benefits to the Russian Orthodox Church and the three other religions deemed traditional to Russia: Judaism, Buddhism and Islam. Under one version of the proposed law, a so-called traditional religious organization must have been active in Russia for no less than 50 years - that dates back to 1955 - and have no fewer than 100,000 adherents - a number greater than any similar law that I'm familiar with - and must have been an inalienable part of Russian history.

One key backer of the draft law on traditional religions, with whom our commission met when we visited, state Duma member Alexander Chuev, is rumored to have signed a letter calling on the procurator general to ban all Jewish organizations, although he has refuted that claim. Nevertheless, the incident surrounding that letter highlights a dangerous trend in Russian public life: many officials ignore or encourage anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and Russian chauvinism, thereby fanning xenophobia among the Russian people.

In July 2002, the state Duma passed a controversial law on countering religious extremism. One major weakness in the law is its very broad definition of extremism. It says it is the "propaganda of exclusivity, superiority, or inferiority of citizens on account of their attitude towards religion." Such a definition would apply to the adherents of many faiths who believe in the exclusive truth of their confession. Indeed, the signers of the recent anti-Semitic letter grounded their appeal in this religious extremism law, providing a vivid example of how it can be abused. When states have the obligation to protect the public from acts of violent extremism, they must carefully weigh how best to protect the public without infringing on the legitimate rights of citizens.

Russia's rapid retreat from democracy and human rights is a matter of deep concern for the United States Commission, and I hope for all of you here today. After all, Russia is still a rainmaker for most countries emerging from decades of communist control. The world has learned that how a government treats its own citizens is a key indicator of its long-term stability and its reliability as a partner in international relations. The commission hopes that President Bush will raise issues of human rights, including religious freedom, in his upcoming meeting with President Putin.

Now, I now have the distinct pleasure of welcoming our three expert witnesses, who will provide us with an in-depth look at the issues that I have outlined. Our first witness will be Paul Goble, who is sitting next to me, followed by Nickolai Butkevich, and then Lawrence Uzzell. Each of them will speak about 15 minutes and we will then open the floor to your questions.

Paul Goble will analyze the status if Islam in Russia. He is a senior research associate of the EuroCollege at the University of Tartu in Estonia, has served in the Central Intelligence Agency, the U.S. Department of State, and in U.S. international broadcasting as a specialist on ethnic and religious minorities in the countries of the former Soviet Union. He has long been the gold star in addressing these issues and helping us understand them, and I'm really delighted that you could be here with us today.

Nickolai Butkevich - I'm going to introduce all three and then we'll have the presentations and questions thereafter. Nickolai Butkevich will discuss anti-Semitism and other forms of extremism in Russia. He is research and advocacy director at the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union, the premier group doing monitoring on this issue on the ground and long-standing source of helping us understand these trends, and he has published widely on extremism in Russia. I'm also very grateful to you for joining us.

And finally, Lawrence Uzzell, who will describe the situation of Russia's Christian communities. He is president of the new organization, International Religious Freedom Watch, an independent research center that analyzes threats to freedom of conscience in totalitarian and authoritarian countries, but he is no newcomer to this issue. We look forward to your presentations, gentleman, and I thank you very much for being here with us.

Paul, if you would begin.

PAUL GOBLE: Thank you very much.

By what they have done and what they have left undone, the Russian authorities, from President Vladimir Putin on down, have been responsible in recent years for a dramatic increase in anti-Islamic attitudes among the Russian people and for significant increases in the number of violations of the legal, constitutional and human rights of the Muslim citizens of that country. That development, in and of itself, is distressing, but it entails two others that make this situation with regard to Russia's Muslims even more serious. On the one hand, the Russian authorities are rapidly generating the very Islamic extremism that they routinely invoke to justify their actions, and on the other by promoting, participating in, or allowing attacks on Muslims, they are opening the door to attacks on members of other religious and ethnic groups there, and thus undermining any possibility that the Russian Federation may become a liberal law-based state anytime soon.

Because of these trends, the nearly universal failure of Western governments, publics, and even human rights organizations to monitor the rise of Islamophobia among Russian officials in the Russian public and to denounce this form of bigotry in the clearest possible way is particularly indefensible. Consequently I would like to commend the commission for organizing this session and to thank you for giving me the opportunity to discuss an issue that unfortunately gets far less attention than I believe it deserves.

In my remarks I would like to consider three interrelated sets of questions. First, who are the Muslims of the Russian Federation - they're not a group that everyone knows - and why do so many ethnic Russians in the Russian state feel so threatened by them just now? Second, what are the Russian authorities, both in Moscow, and importantly in the regions, been doing with regard to that community, and why is it so dangerous, not only to Muslims but to the country as a whole? And third, what has the West's response been up to now and what should we be doing to defend the rights of this community and indeed our own national interests?

For most countries around the world we have relatively good census and survey data about the religious affiliations of the population. That is not true in the case of the Russian Federation. There has not been a question about religion on a census there since the end of the 19th century. The Soviet system of course was committed to atheism and actively discouraged people from identifying in religious terms, and there have not been any reliable countrywide surveys of religious identification in the post-Soviet Russian Federation. There have been partial surveys but most of them are problematic.

As a result, the number of Muslims in the Russian Federation is very much a matter of dispute. President Putin famously said that there are some 20 million Muslims there. Some Muslim leaders in Russia say there may be as many as 30 to 35 million. Most sociologists and anthropologists argue that there are not more than 14 million - the number of people in the nationalities of that country which were historically Islamic. Some Russian specialists on religious have suggested that there are probably no more than 7 million Muslim believers, and perhaps Moscow's leading specialist on religious behavior said recently that only about 800,000 Russian citizens are in fact active Muslim believers, a relatively small number but one, he has pointed out, is equal to the number of active Russian Orthodox believers and active Christian sectarians. So it all depends on how you want to define it.

Within this plethora of numbers there is a basic divide between those who treat Islam in terms of actual belief and its structures and those who treat it as characteristic of certain ethnic communities and talk about what they call ethnic Muslims. That is a division I will follow here, first looking at the status of the religious community in the post-Soviet period and then at the demographic situation with regard to the historically Islamic nationalities.

Like other religious faiths, Islam in the post-Soviet period continues to suffer from the legacy of the Soviet past. The Soviet government bureaucratically structured a community in a way that was fundamentally at variance with the nature of Islam. There is no such thing as a clergy in Islam. There is no clerical function and therefore there can be no clerical hierarchy. The creation of Muslim spiritual directorates, first by the czarist authorities and then by the Soviets, represented a violation of the nature of Islam and is usually picked up because people find it easy to use these terms, but in fact it represented an attempt to convert Islam into a Christian-style religion, and that very fact, in Soviet times, led to the division of the faith. On the one hand, there were a tiny number of officially recognized Muslim clergy in these hierarchies, who were prepared to sacrifice many basic aspects of Islam, either because they believe that or were under compulsion to do so from the atheistic state. That form of Islam, referred to by all involved as official Islam, had very little authority among traditional believers.

On the other hand, in Soviet times there was a much larger popular or traditional Islam, seldom with access to trained mullahs, and hence increasingly affected by extra-Islamic traditions. People who could remember Muslim prayers, or even a few sura of the Koran served as mullahs, but the faith itself was inevitably degraded and largely reduced in most parts of the Russian Federation - parts of the North Caucasus are an exception - to the status of ritual. Such believers had no recognized rights to function in Soviet times, and consequently, anyone who participated in such displays of faith were acting in a deeply political way, something that in and of itself helps to explain the nature of the Islamic response after the collapse of communism.

After 1991, the situation changed dramatically for the Muslims of Russia. The number of Muslim spiritual directorates increased from two, for the Russian Federation, to more than 60 today, often competing with one another as to who can best serve the Russian state. The number of mosques in Russia over the same period rose from approximately 150 to more than 8,000 today, with many of these being built with money from abroad, especially from Middle Eastern countries. The number of Russian Muslims making the Hajj rose from 40 in 1991 to more than 9,600 this year. And the number of Russian Muslims olimah (ph), religious experts, who were being trained at foreign universities went from 20 in 1991, which was up from four the year before, to approximately 400 a year now.

To cope with that explosive growth and reflecting the opening of the Russian Federation's southern borders - and I would like to emphasize this - we in the West talk about the opening of Russia's Western borders, but we forget that the opening of the southern borders may have had an even greater impact on that country than we have. The number of Muslim missionaries coming from abroad rose from only a handful in 1991 to a thousand a year by the late ‘90s, with the number having fallen off since 2001.

Many of these missionaries, many of the people trained abroad, came back with a very different Islam, often what we call fundamentalist or the Salafia brand of Islam, and they engaged in a dialogue with people locally. So instead of having two kinds of Islam - the official Islam and this popular Islam - we now have a whole spectrum of Islamic faith: traditional spiritual directorates, fundamentalism, radicalism, revivalism within popular Islam, and a small, modernist Euro-Islamic group as well. Most people only pay attention to the spiritual directorates and the radicals and ignore the 90 percent of the community that is not engaged in either part, and that's critical.

The

demographic growth of Russia's traditionally Muslim communities has been even more dramatic. They're growing far more rapidly than the ethnic Russians and will outnumber the latter within 20 to 25 years. Indeed, by 2015 the traditionally Muslim nationalities will constitute a majority of the draft-age population, which is a dramatic shift in a country that has historically thought of itself as Christian. Some of this is a result of differences in birthrates. At present - and I'm using data from 2002, which is the best we have for the city of Moscow - the average ethnic Russian woman there had a fertility rate of slightly more than one child in her lifetime, far below the replacement level of 2.2. The average woman in Moscow from a traditionally Muslim nationality had from six to eight. You don't have to go very long until that has enormous consequences. Moscow today is already the largest Muslim city in Europe, and there are major Muslim nationality populations in all major Russian cities and regions, something that has never been true before. There is even a mosque in Arkhangelsk and a new mosque on the island of Sakhalin, something that would have been unthinkable a decade ago. This has not only brought Muslims who lived in very divided - far apart together and began to think, "What makes us commonly Muslim?" But it has brought them in contact with Russians, and this has created all kinds of problems. On the one hand, this is a demographic shift that is unprecedented. On another, the ethnic Muslims - historically Islamic peoples have had a far easier time of adapting to the post-Communist world because, as someone brilliantly pointed out, a Russian Orthodox Christian has to sacrifice much of the church's teaching about the virtues of poverty to become a capitalist. A Russian Muslim only needs to remember that Mohammed's father was a merchant; and I think that's something we don't think enough about, but it explains a great deal.

In the first post-Soviet decade, three developments, I think, came together to promote the spread of anti-Muslim attitudes and behavior in the Russian Federation. First, the rise of Islam that I've just sketched frightened many ethnic Russians, and that's something that - especially because a number of ethnic Russians began to convert to Islam.

Second, given the dislocations of life after the collapse of communism, many Russians wanted to find somebody to blame. There's a wonderful exhibit in Moscow just now organized by Memorial (ph) called "Tell Me Your Enemy," and showing the way in which enemies have played a key role in defining how Russians see things. Well, the current enemy of choice are Muslims. One of the reasons for that is that Russians had it made very clear to them that engaging in attacks on Jews would get them in much more trouble abroad than attacks on Muslims. That's a reality; and as a result of this, Muslims now say - and they've said it to many people, not just the Washington Post - "Today, we are the new Jews," and that is something that is very scary.

And third, in the 1990s under Boris Yeltsin, there was almost a total collapse of state authority. That meant that Moscow didn't control the regions very much or even many of the things that Russian officials in the capital did; and it meant that many groups in the society began to act with impunity, engaging in violence against their fellow citizens. These

trends, unfortunately, received very little attention in the Russian or western media, often because the most egregious cases of Islamophobia took place outside of Moscow and hence beyond the view of either or many in the Russian media, including its most liberal outlets, were themselves anti-Islamic, linking Muslims to Chechnya, blaming Islam as other Russians did and therefore didn't talk about it. It is interesting that the only part of the Russian media which has been pro-Muslim on a consistent basis is precisely the part of the media that is not read in the West, namely the red-brown, communist-nationalist press, who sees ties with Islam as not being a bad thing, largely because they hope, I think, to get support for anti-Semitism, which isn't nice either.

While appalling under Boris Yeltsin, the situation has become far worse under Vladimir Putin. Putin has explicitly used ethnic hostility against Chechens and others to power his own rise to power. He and his supporters were almost certainly involved in the blowing up of the apartment blocks in Moscow and elsewhere, a set of actions that Elena Bonner classically characterized as Russia's version of the Reichstag Fire; and as a result, the war in Chechnya has become far more racist and Islamophobic under Putin than it was under Boris Yeltsin. There's a big change that is not much talked about, but it's critical. At the same time, Putin has moved to re-centralize power, cutting the authority of non-Russian groups, reducing the importance of ethnicity in his country, and therefore magnifying the importance of religion.

Religion is far more important in Russia today precisely because nationality is much less so, and I think that's something we need to think about. The pattern that we saw in 2001 was exacerbated after September 11th when Vladimir Putin concluded that he could use his declaration of loyalty in the war on terrorism to justify almost anything in Chechnya and against Muslims, and he did so. In the past five years, the percentage of Russians expressing anti-Russian Muslim views has more than doubled, with every more Russians calling for the expulsion of non-Russians from their cities and especially Muslim groups. And this harassment, beatings, and even killings of Muslims have increased with officials doing little or nothing to stop it, and even taking decisions that open the way to it or help. Exploiting these attitudes the Russian authorities - again, from Putin on down - have frequently made statements that these are bad things, but they have not acted. It is curious that the people who engage in these terrible acts are seldom, if ever, punished; and usually they're not even identified.

Of the hundreds of incidents that I have tracked over the last five years, I want to mention three because they are the easiest to talk about. The first is the horrific Beslan hostage taking incident. Listening to Russian officials or reading the western press, you would think that this was the work of Islamist extremist, that their victims were exclusively non-Muslims, and that the authorities were entirely on the side of law and order. None of those things is true. Not only is there a growing body of evidence that officials were involved in the raid before it happened and afterwards, but 70 percent of the victims were Muslims; and many of the people who were engaged in the attack had

earlier served in the FSB. In the wake of that tragedy, the Russian officials have taken a variety of steps to keep the lid on information about it. There has been more anti-Islamic hysteria in the last six months. I would urge you to read the writings of Father Andrei Korolev (ph) one of the most noxious of the radical nationalist priests. There have been more attacks on Russian Muslims; and President Putin, instead of moving to calm the situation, has moved in just the opposite way, exacerbating things.

Second,
in the last 18 months, there have been more and more actions against Muslims and Muslim communities without any legal justification. One aspect of that campaign is especially disturbing. A year ago this month, the Russian supreme court banned 15 Muslim groups because of their supposed ties to international terrorism. It took that decision in secret session, and never published its findings or even a list of the groups. Nonetheless, prosecutors in courts throughout the Russian Federation have used that unpublished list to arrest and imprison Muslims without much ceremony. Several cases in Moscow and the Middle Volga have been so ugly with officials planting evidence, suborning witnesses, and issuing statements that are completely at odds with reality that have been protested by foreign embassies. It's almost like the famous hotel in Copenhagen that Trotsky was supposed to have plotted in 1936 with Bukharin, and the hotel had burned down in 1930. The government of Azer Baijan had to go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and point out that the camp that was supposed to exist, where this woman was supposed to have gotten terrorist training had never existed because on that site was a vineyard. The Russians then took that part out of the charges; but this kind of thing happens again and again, and Russian media have done everything they can to blame Muslims - to excuse people who attack Muslims.

Two
weeks ago, for example, a Muslim cemetery in Moscow was vandalized. Had it been the cemetery of another faith, many in both Russia and the West might have been outraged. But in Russia today, officials rushed out to explain that this was an act of vandalism, not xenophobia and that the youngsters involved were simply acting because they were bored. This is the fifth such attack on a Muslim cemetery in the Russian capital in the last 24 months and one of dozens that have taken place across the country. One of the few people who responded well was the chief rabbi of Russia, Berl Lazar, who understood what was at stake once you start attacking one ethnic group.

That brings me to my last
issue, and I'll be very quick - the failure of the West and governments, human rights organizations, and others to denounce what's going on to Muslims. Often this has been justified by reference to larger political considerations, sometimes by the absence of reliable information, and quite frequently by the desire to reach out to our Russian friends in Moscow. But that has contributed to this - those sets of attitudes, of actions have contributed to the problem I've been talking about. In October of 1993, the United States took the lead along with other western countries in not denouncing Moscow mayor Luzhkov's noxious decree to expel from the Russian capital persons of

Caucasus nationality. Not only did the United States not condemn that action, but we went to our European allies and told them not to condemn it either, lest we undermine Boris Yeltsin. As a result of that, that decree has been replicated in almost every other major Russian city, leading to the harassment and exploitation of Muslim communities everywhere.

Second, the West has almost unanimously accepted Putin's characterization of the war in Chechnya as part of an international ant-terrorist effort and avoided criticism of what Russian forces have done. The Chechen drive toward independence did not start with terrorism; but Russian policies against the Chechens have largely transformed the national movement into a terrorist one. Nothing and no one can justify terrorism; but that plague will not be overcome if we ignore the policies that gave rise to it; and the very viciousness of Putin's campaign there has produced what he claims he is fighting. And third, our failure to criticize Putin and his regime for anti-Muslim attitudes and actions has opened the way for Russian attacks on Christians and Jews as well. As was reported last month, nearly half of all the skin heads in the world now live in Russia. Most of them are anti-Semitic, but their rise reflects the official tolerance in that country for attacks on indigenous Muslims and migrants. And consequently, we may look back on our own failure to condemn what the Russian government is doing and the Russian government's failure to suppress it as the start of something far worse than what we see now. In that event, we will remember - but perhaps too late - Nadezhda Mandelshtam's classic observation that "happy is that country where the despicable will at least be despised."

In my prepared remarks, I list five things we should not do and five things that I think we should do. Let me end by just reading the five things I urge that we do. First, we need to carefully monitor what is going on to the Muslim community, not only in Moscow but across the entire enormous Russian Federation. Second, we need to bring the bright light of publicity on this evil rather than ignoring it as we often do. Third, we need to educate people why attacks on Muslims are attacks on all of our rights rather than assuming we only need to defend our own community or those communities nearest to us. Fourth, we have to take the initiative in explaining what is going on there to the widest possible audience; and fifth, we have to speak out and condemn evil actions. Sometimes, indeed quite often, that is all we can do; but never let it be said that we did not do at least that. Thank you.

MS. GAER: Thank you very much, Paul.

We now turn to Nickolai Butkevich.

NICKOLAI

BUTKEVICH: Hello I'd like to thank the Commission and the Kennan Institute for organizing this talk. The issue of xenophobia in Russia and anti-Semitism is very brave and complicated so I'm only going to talk about two of its aspects today - the aspects I know best. Number one: hate crimes, hate groups, and how the Russian state has responded to them or, in some cases, not responded; and, number two: recent anti-Semitic attacks on in Moscow and in the Moscow region.

There are two countervailing trends when it comes to hate crimes and hate groups. The first is strongly negative, and that is that every year, a number of hate crimes and membership in hate groups, especially in skinhead groups, is rising. There are a lot of statistics thrown around about this, and I'd like to add some caveat before I cite any of them. First, that Russian law enforcement agencies have an unfortunate habit of classifying what we would call hate crimes here as ordinary acts of hooliganism or ordinary murders in, what I believe, is a deliberate effort to obfuscate this issue and avoid bad publicity.

Secondly, a lot of the victims, as Paul was saying, are migrants who are illegally present in the Russian Federation and therefore do not want to go to the police. Third, a lot of people are afraid of the police - not just minorities, but ethnic Russians, as well - as being particularly brutal and, in some cases, racist. So these numbers are to some degree suspect, but at least they do show a trend in rising hate crimes. For instance, last month a SOVA Center in Moscow, which is headed by Alexander Verkhovsky who is the leading Russian expert on neo-Nazis in that country, released a report that stated that in 2004, the number of murders motivated by ethnic or religious hatred had double compared to 2003. They recorded 44 incidents. Again, the real number is much higher.

Another number that gets cited a lot and was even cited in the U.S. State Department's latest country condition reports on human rights in Russia is the 50,000 skinheads in the country. I know where this number came from. I know the expert, at least by reputation, who originally came up with his number. I'm not sure how he came up with this number. I don't think he went door to door looking for skinheads. If he did, he probably wouldn't have lived to tell the tale; and it's not like you can go to the Ministry of Justice and ask for a charter and a list of members so I'm a little bit skeptical about this number.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs actually has a lower number but still quite significant: they estimate between 15 and 20 thousand skinheads in the country, which makes the statement by the Chief of Police of Moscow last month that was mentioned earlier - that there are no organized skinhead groups in his capital - even more bizarre. But, I guess, just anecdotally to show the trend, when I first began working at the Union of Councils in the late '90s, reports about hate crimes in Russia would cross my desk maybe two or three times a week. Now it's not uncommon for me to get

that many reports in a single day; and reports about the activities of skinheads in different cities back then were mostly confined to Moscow and St. Petersburg. Now, they're in not just large cities, but in medium and, in some cases, small cities. Not just European Russia, but as far away as Siberia and the Far East, which are traditionally more tolerant regions. Basically, the skinheads are almost everywhere.

Now, in addition to this very strongly negative trend, there is a somewhat moderately positive, countervailing trend; and law enforcement officials are beginning to take this problem more seriously. Up into about 2001, 2002, the vast majority of reported hate crimes - that I saw, anyway - would result in no arrests or convictions. Starting around 2001, 2002, the Moscow police, at least, started to make more and more arrests; and we started to see in subsequent years the same thing happen in St. Petersburg and in other cities as well. So this is a bit of good news. It's very important that the police are finally taking this problem more seriously. Unfortunately, as I mentioned, they continue to classify these crimes as ordinary acts of hooliganism or ordinary murders rather than hate crimes; and this does not only disservice to the victims of these crimes and to the statistics, but it also sets up a situation where the skinheads can beat the hooliganism charge. They get off rather than facing another hate crimes charge; and if the do get convicted, they often have rather low sentences.

But even here there is a little bit of hope in that - I should mention first that I'm using the term "hate crimes" here as a kind of a shorthand so everybody understands what I'm saying - ethnically or religiously motivated violence. The term, itself, doesn't actually exist in Russian legislation. They have four articles in the criminal code that deal with what we would call hate crimes; and the most commonly used is Article 282, which prohibits actions aimed at the incitement of ethnic or religious hatred. This article - the way it's used most often in the relatively rare cases where a prosecutor either because of his own conscience or because of media pressure that there has to be an official statement that this crime was a hate crime, they often tag an Article 282 charge along with an ordinary hooliganism or a murder charge in order to lengthen the sentence. And this practice has become more and more common. Our bureau in Moscow released a study showing that in the year 2000, there were only 17 Article 282 cases in the entire country whereas in the year 2003, the number had jumped to 72; but out of those 72, only 11 ever made it to a court. And those that made it to a court - the vast majority of them ended in either suspended sentences or in convictions followed immediately by an amnesty. Sometimes an amnesty in honor of the Soviet Union's victory over the Nazis in World War II is particularly ironic.

One trend that we noticed there as well that's connected to Paul's talk is that the exception to this rule in general is if the accused is accused of being an Islamic extremist or a Chechen rebel, which in the official mind in Russia is often the same thing. Then they get the Article 282 really - they get the book thrown at them and then they get convicted. But what's particularly frustrating about this is not only that these cases fall apart, but that there are other parts of the criminal code,

as I mentioned, that are more appropriate for dealing with what we would call hate crimes. The main reason why these cases fall apart, aside from bias in some cases, is that this article was really meant to combat hate speech - incitement; but there are three other articles of the criminal code - Article 105 which deals with murder, Article 111 which deals with aggravated assault, Article 112 which deals with simple assault - that each have sections within them that read "motivated by ethnic or religious hatred." But until 2003, no successful convictions were ever achieved under these articles, and actually it was only tried twice as far as I know.

In 2003, this started to change in that they at least achieved a conviction under the hate crimes statute 105 for murder - the murder of an Armenian boy in Moscow by a group of skinheads. And last year, there were three of these types of cases opened in Russia, two of which resulted in convictions, one of which is still pending. So you can see that there's a trend developing here where the Russian authorities are beginning to evolve from a strategy of just outright denial and indifference to at least beginning to apply the law the way it's supposed to be applied at least in some cities; and one of these murder cases happened in Voronezh, and I think it's an interesting case study to study this evolution. Voronezh is a city in central Russia that has a reputation for being particularly bad when it comes to skinheads and also for having law enforcement agencies that are particularly indifferent to this problem.

And indeed in 2002 and 2003 the heads of the NBD and the FSB, which is successor agency to the KGB, each said in separate statements that skinheads do not exist in their city. So it was no surprise that when, in February 2004, a gang of skinheads murdered an African student named Arturo (sic) Lima that police denied that it had anything to do with racism. They even spread rumors to the effect that Mr. Lima was murdered because he used the services of a prostitute and refused to pay and therefore the pimp supposedly went after him; but one of the skinheads later made a statement in court which undermined this theory when he said that "we went to Mir (ph) Street where we new there were foreign student dorms because we were bored and we wanted to kill a black." So once this became public, that theory was untenable and the local prosecutors actually reclassified the case as an Article 105 hate crimes murder case and achieved a conviction, which was later upheld. So this is a good example not only of this evolution but in the power of publicity because if it weren't for the publicity around this and the criticism of the Voronezh authorities' initial reaction of denial, this conviction under this article would not have been achieved.

To conclude this section of my testimony, I would like to say that even though we have better law enforcement practices, it's clear that the first tendency I mentioned of rising hate crimes and rising hate groups is not being blunted enough by these better police practices and that the situation is almost to the point where it's getting out of control and might even inspire some sort of counter reactions from some of the victimized groups. This is extremely dangerous, and so it's obvious that beyond law enforcement practices we need the Russian government

and international foundations to do a better job of funding tolerance programs.

The Swedish Embassy in Moscow, for instance, has a great program where they go to the schools and they teach about the Holocaust about which many Russians are ignorant; and there's a group in San Francisco called the Bay Area Council of Jewish Rescue and Renewal, which has a program they call the Climate of Trust where they bring law enforcement officials from Russia to San Francisco, where they meet with American law enforcement counterparts and they learn about what a hate crime is and how to deal with it. Programs like this definitely need more support, and certainly if the economy got better, that would help a lot as well.

Now, I'd like to use the remaining few minutes of time that I have to talk about recent anti-Semitic incidents in Moscow. Ironically enough, the year began with the Russian Foreign Ministry blasting the State Department for its report on global anti-Semitism, which, among other things, criticized the use of anti-Semitic rhetoric by political parties, especially the Motherland Party, which was created - (audio break, tape change) -- on New Year's Eve, a synagogue was burned down in - a suspected arson -- in a suburban Moscow town called Saltykolva (ph). The head of the local Jewish community there told a reporter that he believe that it was the work of the neo-Nazi group Russian National Unity, and even worse, that the police had actually invited Russian National Unity into this town several months before because they wanted him to drive out the ethnic Azeri, mostly Muslim, market traders in that town.

And after they had accomplished that task, they turn to attack at a Jew community and they beat up two Jewish youths in that town. The mother of one of these youths was cited in the report as saying that she begged the Jewish community leader not to bring this to the attention of the police because if they did, the Russian National Unity would come to her house and cut her throat. So again, this is another reason why - (chuckles) - hate crime statistics are rather problematic. In some cases the police are working with the facets and not protecting the minority communities from them.

On New Year's Day, there was an attack on the metro against a man who looked Jewish and the suspect admitted as much - that this is why he attacked him - he thought he was Jewish. It turned out that he wasn't. But despite the fact that he gave the man a severe beating, he was actually let go without any charges being filed. And there were five attacks in the Marinarosha (ph) district of Moscow as well in December of 2004 and January 2005, including an attack against a very prominent rabbi, Alexander Lokshin (ph), who was so badly beaten that even his spine was damaged and he had to be hospitalized. To the credit of the local police, they did make some arrests and after those arrests were made, I haven't heard of any other attacks in district of Moscow.

The
incident that everybody in the room knows about and which was mentioned earlier was the letter to the prosecutor's office, signed by around 500 people including - well, it contained the signatures at least of 19 members of the State Duma. The letter asked for a ban on Jewish organizations in Russia and shocked even me who is quite jaded by calling Judaism a satanic religion which requires its adherence to ritually murder Christian children and drink their blood.

From
what I can understand, there is a lot of contradictory reports about how many people actually signed this, how many have claimed to have signed it. Subsequently, I find at least four of the signers - statements by them in the press that confirm that they signed it. And seven of the signers who have not made any statement one way or the other have long histories of anti-Semitic rhetoric. I believe it's very likely that they signed it as well. So I would put the number at 11 but I'm not very sure. Two have claimed not to sign it including Mr. Churef (ph) who was mentioned earlier.

There are a lot of
theories about why this was done. Was it done to distract public attention from these benefits protests that were mentioned earlier, which are a real threat to the popularity of the president? Alexander Krutov himself, who signed the letter - and he is a member of the Motherland faction. He is the one who actually wrote the letter - has said that he sent the letter a couple of months ago and that it wasn't meant to be an open letter. And it was he was just trying to get a prosecutor general act against, quote, unquote, "Jewish extremists" and that the prosecutor's office just held on to it and is releasing it now in an effort to the hurt the Motherland Party, which is trying to take a stand against the Kremlin despite the fact that they have always been the Kremlin's creature.

To me, that's not really that
important why - the timing of the letter or anything like that. What is important is all of these members of the Duma, knowing that they were going to have to face reelection in 2007, felt confident enough in either the anti-Semitism over their voters or more likely - at least the indifference to anti-Semitism among their voters - that they could sign this letter which accuses Jews of drinking the blood of Christian children and not fear for their seats in the Duma. And that to me says more about the situation than any statement by the Russian government minimizing this problem.

I should say that the president
did react - President Putin reacted to this letter when he was in Auschwitz or in (Krakow ?) actually for the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. He condemned anti-Semitism but in very general terms, which is what he always does. I don't remember one incident

where has actually condemned somebody or some party by name. It's always kind of a general thing, which is good but not as good as it could be. And the Duma on Friday passed a resolution by a fairly large margin condemning the letter. The president's party, United Russia, aligned with many independent deputies in passing it; the Motherland actually abstained - and the Communist and Zhirinovsky's party voted against it.

Well, I think I'm at - I'm going to end because I'm pretty sure my time must be up so - I want to give Larry plenty of time to talk. Thank you for your attention.

MS. GAER: Thank you. And thank you, Larry.

LAWRENCE UZZELL: Thank you. Thank you all three of you. And thanks not only to the commission but to the Kennan Institute. I'm always grateful to be the guest of either of these organizations. This is the first chance I have ever had to be the guest of both at the same time, although I do feel a little awkward. I'm not sure you have done me a favor by putting me in the company of two such powerhouses as these. It's going to be an awfully tough pair of acts for me to follow.

Maybe I should - how many people have my written statements? Is there anybody here who does not have my written statement? Okay, that gives us a lot more room for maneuver. I'm not going to go through my written statements. If you want to read it, it's there; I won't repeat it verbatim. Somewhere in that statement, I reveal the mystery of life, but I'm not going to say it my remarks. (Laughter.) So you'll find out only if you read the statement.

I'll start making - by saying something that is not in the statement, just playing off of what Nick has said - I think we should make a distinction between the culpable criminal - at least morally criminal nonfeasance of the state in failing to prosecute acts that it should be prosecuting - acts of vandalism, violence, murder - which is certainly serious and we need to monitor that as vigorous as we can. The distinction between that and acts by the state itself where the state itself is the guilty party; where the state is shutting down communities; where the state is ordering directors of movie theaters and schools not to rent out their facilities to certain disfavored minorities groups of religious - or other minority groups.

And most of what I have to say is going to be about that type of overt state action against minorities,

often codified specifically in laws in that on their face, in their text, are brazenly anti-minority.

I'm going to start with the Jehovah's Witnesses. There used to be a joke among law students. Some of you who are recent law graduates may know better than I would that this joke is still told. But there used to be a joke - that the Jehovah's Witnesses don't really exist - that they were invented by Constitutional law professors so that there would be test cases of religious freedom. (Laughter.) And it's really striking for such a small group how many landmark cases of religious freedom in American Constitutional law. The First Amendment law involved the Jehovah's Witnesses.

It just happens right now that the most important thing that has happened in the area of religious freedom in Russia in the last year is the Jehovah's Witness case - the case in Moscow, which I go into in some detail in my remarks. It's interesting that as always, it's not put into effect systematically. If it were - if the court decision were being put into practice the way you would expect to just from reading its formal text, there would be no Jehovah's Witness activity in Moscow; it would all be band. But the decision would at least for the moment be irrelevant outside of Moscow; it's a decision of a Moscow city court, which is supposed to apply within Moscow.

What we find, however, as is almost always the case, is that a decision like this acts as an informal signal all across the country and almost immediately as far east as Sakhalin- you're getting a crackdown on the Jehovah's Witnesses clearly triggered by this court decision. And within Moscow, it's not as bad as you might have predicted - if all you read was the formal text and if you didn't know the context of how just things always work in Russia.

Russia is not a country of the rule of law. The application of law is always a sometime thing in Russia and that's true when the laws are good - that's true of the 1993 constitution with its generally excellent provisions defending religious freedom and freedom of the press and other human rights. But it's also true when the laws are bad. The 1997 law reestablishing state control of religious life - it's never been enforced as strictly - as harshly as you would be - as you would expect it if you just read the formal text.

One episode in the Jehovah's Witness enforcement that I think is worth calling attention to is the Chelyabinsk episode in which the Witnesses had a contract to rent a stadium for a summer convention and the quid pro quo was that they were supposed to provide physical - conduct physical restoration of the stadium, which the Jehovah's Witnesses faithfully went ahead.

The stadium was nicely restored, ready for further activities in the future.

It's time for the Jehovah's Witnesses to have their convention and guess what happens. The authorities tell them that, well, in light of this court decision in Moscow and also - I take that back - I think I misspoke there - the authorities took the pretext that sports stadia are only for sports events; they are not for religious events, even though they had already signed a specific contract and they knew who they were signing it with, and all of the sudden, the Jehovah's Witnesses are left holding the bag for having repaired this stadium but don't get to have their convention there.

One of the most disturbing things has been the failure of the leaders of mainstream religions in Russia and of other minority religions to speak up about the Jehovah's Witnesses. I know the Jehovah's Witnesses are not popular. There are religions that people like, that are cuddly, that are popular even with people who don't share their beliefs. The Jehovah's Witnesses are not one of those religions. They are pushy, they are obnoxious, they are disliked in Russia for much the same reason that they are widely disliked in America. But hey, there is no law against being pushy and obnoxious. And every country in the world that meets minimum standards of religious freedom allows the Jehovah's Witnesses to exist as a mainstream religious organization and does not take away their rights.

I want to read you a quotation.
"As regards confession of faith proper, that is, the relationship of a person with the Almighty, there cannot and should not be any restrictions of freedom. But as regards relationships among people, the law has the right to say its piece." That was in response to the Moscow city court decision. If you parse that text, it doesn't really seem to be that far from the Soviet view of religion - that you can have in the depths of your own heart whatever relationship of prayer and belief you want with the almighty, but you can't count on having any right to band together with likeminded believers and do things in public. That the state claims a right to regulate the way the state in America has the right to decide who has a license to fly a plane. Now, the man who said, I'm sorry to is Berl Lazar, one of the two claimants to be chief rabbi of Russia.

Further irony: Irkutsk is an unusual place near Lake Baikal, one of the most beautiful places in Russia. Last time I visited Irkutsk, I found that it has a huge Jehovah's Witness population because of Jehovah's Witnesses being exiled there under Stalin. And it's one of the very few places in Russia where the Jehovah's Witnesses are a favored religious minority; they are the beneficiaries of discrimination in their favor. They get free grants of land from the local authorities and other privileges that other minority religions do not get.

I go and talk to the local
Jehovah's Witness leaders in Irkutsk. I asked them how church-state relations are and I get this glowing portrayal - that everything is wonderful in Irkutsk. If that were your only source of information, you would have no idea that Irkutsk where there are repressionable believers, where there have been serious attacks on American protestant missionaries. You are left with the sad conclusion that all too often, religions which have themselves known oppression get used to state favoritism and state discrimination very quickly when they are the beneficiaries of it.

Just a few words about the
Protestants - I go into more detail in my written statement. The major thing lately over the last year as been cancellation of rental contracts for movie theaters and other public buildings - this varies wildly from one region of the country to another. It often depends on personal relationships between an individual pastor and local officials. And again, we find that the formal laws are irrelevant.

If
we had been holding this gathering in 2002, we would have said that things looked very bad for the Catholics - when in a space of about six months, five Catholic priests were kicked out of the country, including one bishop. There was a real upsurge of anti-Catholic activity. Today, things are somewhat better for the Catholics than they were a couple years ago - continuing to get worse for the Protestants, especially for certain groups of Protestants. All of these changes are unconnected with any formal changes in statute law, of court decisions, transparent administrative regulations. The Protestants who are worst off I would say are those who have the least connection with the West.

And
again, I think that is something that is not sufficiently appreciated in this country. If you just went by the annual State Department reports on religious freedom, which have a lot of information about those protestant and for that matter other religious groups that have good public relations offices - that know how to work inside the beltway - know how to get the attention of people like the people in this room, you would not realize from the State Department report that you are much worse off in Russia being - (speaks in Russian) - unregistered Baptist than you are being a Mormon.

And
that really came home to me in September when I visited the Chekhov district, south of Moscow, and toured what had been a house church of the unregistered Baptists but had burned down in a very mysterious fire just a couple of days before I visited. I won't go into all of the detail; you can look it up on our website which is reported - the URL is in my written statement. There is circumstantial evidence linking the arson attack on this building to a police raid on the local Baptist community a few weeks earlier. But what's even more telling is that - I

just found out last week that the Baptists are now trying to rebuild this house church. They have specifically been told by the local authorities that if you persist in rebuilding this church, we are going to send in a bulldozer and tear it down. And this is really bringing back haunting memories of the Soviet Union, which tore down more houses of worship of all things - than any other regime in history.

How am I doing on time?

MS. GAER: You have about four more minutes.

MR. UZZELL: Four more minutes. Okay, I'll have to race through the rest of what I wanted to say.

On the Catholics, one last point that I thought was interesting was that the European Union got involved in the case of one priest in Krasnodar in the deep south, which is also one of the most anti-Semitic parts of Russian's - (off mike). And a pleasant surprise there. Contrary to the trends in some other regions lately, they were able to get a three-month visa turned into a one year visa so this priest doesn't have to go all the way back, schlep all the way - that's a church Latin term - schlep all of the way back to Poland once every three months to get his visa revised. And that shows us that foreign pressure, intelligent involvement from Western governments can make a difference.

Unfortunately, that pressure - I don't want to say is exercised too much on behalf of the religions with good lobbies because I am in favor of that. I want to say that it's exercised too little on behalf of the religions that don't have good lobbies - the "initsiativniki" Baptists, the Old Believers, the Orthodox who are non-mainstream Orthodox who are - well, schismatics, lets call them - but they wouldn't call themselves that - who are part of structures that don't want to be under the Moscow Patriarchate.

The alternative orthodox, if I can use that phrase - I mean, especially to the situation right now in which the Moscow Patriarchate moves toward reunion with the Russian Orthodox Church abroad. And just last month, there was a police raid in Starvopol region in the deep south, in which the police were accompanied by clergy of the Moscow Patriarchate, putting pressure on this local schismatic bishop to demand that he place himself under the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate.

I

have a lot to say about the question of whether or not Russia is becoming a theocracy but I've run out of time. That's all in my written statement. Let me just close on an encouraging note: the recent development of Patriarch Aleksi's to me very surprising and out of character criticism of the Russian government for the monetization of social benefits - the slashing of the in-kind subsidies to pensioners and the like. This is really and encouraging thing.

I don't pretend to understand why it happened. It could be that the patriarch is getting is old - his conscience is awakening as his health declines - (scattered laughter). It could be connected with Putin's drop in popularity. It could be intelligation for the fact that Putin has clearly personally distanced himself from the Patriarch - not going to Christmas services with the Patriarch most recently and perhaps it is just a fluke - just a one timer. But in any case, it shows us how the Moscow Patriarchy could potentially become a powerful actor in building a genuine civic society in Russia. But both the Patriarchate and the Kremlin have a long way to go. Thank you.

MS. GAER: Well, thank you very much. We have a lot here to take on and what I proposed to do is to open the floor to questions and if you would state your name and tell us your affiliation, if any, and who you are asking the question of. We'll try to moderate a dialogue in that fashion.

I am struck by the argument made on the panel about the distinction between inaction and action of the authorities - the inaction and the failure to protect as opposed to the actual promotion of abuses. And I hope you'll forgive me for sort of a throw back but I remember studying years ago about the transformation of quantity into quality. And I think that in this context and at a certain point, the failure to protect becomes and act in and of itself of abuse. So I hope we can deal with both sides of this picture as we deal with it.

In any case, the floor is open and I welcome questions. Yes.

Q: Hi, my name is Orey Mear (ph). I'm with the - (inaudible).

And my question is I think mainly to Ms. Gaer but whoever on the panel would like to explore this issue and that has to do with the bilateral aspect - the U.S.-Russian aspect of this. I understand that members of the commission are to meet with the president sometime soon later this month if I understand correctly. Is that something you are going to

raise there? Are you going to talk about it? What exactly are you going to ask him to do when he meets with President Putin?

And one specific question to Mr. Goble: you mentioned President Putin particularly, specifically either by action or inaction - both - (chuckles) -- encouraging Islamophobia. If you could talk a little about that.

MR. GOBLE: Sure.

MS. GAER: Well, in response, first I would like to congratulate you on your article this week dealing with the report by one of the commissioners dealing with a different subject.

The commission is - yes, the commission is going to meet with the president shortly. And one of the reasons we have briefings like this and meetings like this is precisely to gather information and advice, and suggestions as to a variety of issues and I hope that the discussion here will help us formulate our concerns and the particular issues that we'll bring up in that context.

MR. GOBLE: To address - I think Mr. Putin can be held accountable for both direct actions - encouraging anti-Islamic sentiment. His statements about the Chechens go way beyond a discussion of a counterinsurgency operation. His discussions about Islam in general have been divided between generalizations about how we want good relations with the world of Islam followed by incredibly specific and negative, and often not-usable-in-mixed-company terms, and not only in Russia; he said it France. I mean, his statements about what should be done to anyone who questions what he is about in Chechnya - it's one of the reasons I don't travel there.

But, I mean, this is a man who has actively encouraged very ugly sentiments. I personally believe he directed the blowing up of the apartment buildings in '99; I personally believe he has been responsible for the rise of filtration camps in Stavropol; I believe that he has been limited in what wants to do to the Circassian community in the south - suppressing its three different ethnic territories only because a majority of the members of the general staff of the republic of Turkey are Circassians - and he had to have that pointed out to him by the - (inaudible) -- okay. So there have been a whole bunch of direct actions.

As far as indirect actions - you go across the board. I mean, mention has been made about certain legal improvements. Well, where have they been? They have been where they are visible for people in the West to find and they have been where they are visible with respect to religions that the West cares about; they have not been with the respect to the way in which you treat Muslim - that's just a fact. As bad as the initsiativniki may be treated, let me suggest to you that across the Russian Federation, the treatment of being a Muslim is from the point of view of most officials, a prima-facie evidence of criminal intent.

This case which I mentioned in passing as I tried to summarize what I was saying in some - more in my prepared remarks - where you have - (chuckles) - a supreme court decision taken in secret, which you don't publish, and then you use it to convict people - is a very, very dangerous step - it's something straight out of the 1930s, okay. That's not - that was never done under Boris Nikolayevich Yeltsin; that was not done under Gorbachev; that was not even common under Leonid Brezhnev. That takes us back more than 50 years to a very, very ugly time.

When, as it happens, the organizations that are on that list are also on a Western lists, and therefore the idea on insisting on due process is not something that we are very good at doing either. To give you just example - this is what I delight in. According to the Russian legislation, if a particular philosopher or philosophy is identified as related to terrorism, you can be arrested, okay. Well, you should see in which officials are used - with Putin's encouragement - to decide that a particular text is engaged in terrorism and violence.

What is delicious, okay - this is what I treasure. In Dagestan and in most of the north caucuses, the officials who make these arrests and the prosecutors who bring people to trial for texts cannot read the Arabic script in which they are written. But if they are in Arabic, it is sufficient grounds in the courts of the north caucuses and Stavropol Krai, Krasnodar are especially noxious places - that if you have a document that is in Arabic, it is presumably -- it's prima-facie evidence of a crime. Okay.

When this came up - when somebody challenged Putin on this, he blew up - he said this is foreign ties, okay - it must be foreign ties. Frequently, what's even better is the people who are carrying the documents in Arabic script can't read them either. But because they have accepted them from some visitor, that makes them guilty of inciting terrorism and it is a - it is - Mr. Putin has criticized people who criticize them and he just chants, you know, counterterrorism. And unfortunately, that is enough to lead an awful lot of Western governments - often our own - to not worry about due process issues.

I mean, I don't want to see terrorists go scot-free. But I think arresting people on the basis of decisions taken in secret, the planning of evidence, the beating of witnesses, the inventing of cases, and to enjoy the support of the president of the country in the specific cases because at some point - in some venue, he said something positive which allows his apologists in Moscow and in the West to support whatever he does. I think we ought to be glad whenever he says something right. I think we ought to be equally concerned when he says something wrong.

Please take a look at the statements of the U.S. Department of State spokesman on the day after he said what he said in Paris as opposed to the day after what he said when he was at the OIC. The day after the OIC meeting, when he talked about cooperation with the Muslim world, amazingly we had a positive statement. The day after he read the riot act of French journalists and suggested they undergo certain operations in the city of Moscow where they have experienced surgeons, our government said nothing. Now, that's a problem. And that is a problem with Islam in particular because it's - that's a huge bias. And so Putin gets away with it and he and others in the Russian Federation are learning that they can.

MR. UZZELL: Could I comment quickly on that?

MS. GAER: You certainly can and, as you can tell by the question that was asked, and brother who may not know it, we are on the record today.

MR. GOBLE: Yes.

MR. GAER: So I just want you know that. Yes, sir.

MR. UZZELL: We can all get into trouble together. (Laughter.)

MR. GAER: Yeah, absolutely.

MR. GAER: Jump in.

MR. UZZELL: This is going to be a slight oversimplification but I think it captures the essence of the situation. If you're a Jew in Russia today, you have to worry about this nonfeasance. You have to worry about walking down the street, getting beaten by a skinhead, and the state doing nothing about it. If you're a Christian, you really don't have to worry about that. A Catholic priest and there was a murder of a Catholic priest last week but this is not a daily occurrence, to say the least.

What you have to worry about is formal state action - shutting down your activities, denying the right to practice your faith. If you're a Muslim, you have to worry about both. Both.

MR. : Evermore.

MR. UZZELL: And yet - evermore - and yet that doesn't get the attention that it should get. To be fair, if you compare the latest State Department reports on Russia with the State Department reports of five years ago, they have made a lot of progress in this area; they are better than they used to be. They used to - there was nothing about - you would not even have guessed that Muslims were the largest religious minority in Russia.

Another problem, which I invite people to think about is that I have tried to get Muslims in this country about episodes like Starvopol authorities sending in the police to raid Friday worship and effects driving all of Muslim worship underground. And maybe I'm just not a good enough lobbyist but I have not succeeded in getting the American Muslim groups excited about these issues. Why are they doing what you do for the Jews in the former Soviet Union?

MR. GOBLE: Part of this has to do with the nature of Islam - that radically decentralized quality. We want - and we talk about Islam as if it were a religion like Christianity and it's not. The flipside of that is the obsession in Islam about unity. But the obsession with unity is precisely because there is no structure basis for it. And that absence of a structural basis tends to me that there is less cooperation across the miles.

MS. GAER: Further questions? Yes, sir.

Q:
Voice of America - (inaudible) - I would like to ask you one question - (off mike). I remember many years - you testified that - (off mike) - and you said that the - (inaudible) - the new era of the post-Soviet Union that anti-Semitism in Russia would gain priority. It has not yet - (gone away ?) but it became prioritized. But is it safe to say now that anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim activities became nationalized?

MR.
GOBLE: Somehow I do remember the testimony I gave at the slightly outrageous title of the privatization of an ancient evil. I remember that vividly. I think that what Larry has said about the differences in the way religions are treated. I would make two qualifications to what I said. The first is that I think that what is true in one part of Russia and what is true in another part of Russia is much more radically diverse than even I appreciated it at the time - that in places like Krasnodar, in places like Starvopol, it ain't been privatized yet, okay. And I think that Mr. Putin is renationalizing a lot of things and not just corporations.

At the same
time, I think that in the case of religious and ethnic communities that the West cares about - is willing to speak out about - that it has more to do with what private individuals do - sometimes with state encouragement in the state's active intervention on its own. I think that is true and I think as somebody who has spent most of his time lately looking at Islam, which the West isn't too friendly to, there - yet you have got both - you have got both the socialized sector where the government is doing unbelievable things. I mean - you know, you mentioned Cheliabinsk.

Well, in Cheliabinsk, three months
ago, a group of FSB officers turned up at all of the mosques in the city - I think there are four. They forced everyone to lie down on the cold floors. People were getting sick because many of these were old people. They insisted that everybody be fingerprinted. All the draft age - that is 18- to 25-year-old men - were beaten up, held overnight in jail. And then on the heels of this FSB action, the health department came and closed the mosque for sanitary problems.

Well,
you know, this is a concerted effort. And then - what is really delicious is the Cheliabinsk newspaper published a headline the next day - a victory on the counter-terrorist front, okay. And a lot of what is done by officials is so that they can get there - get another star on their - (speaks in Russian) - I mean, it's just the reality. I think it has gone fairly far in privatization with respect to anti-Semitism. I think it has gone some other way with respect to moves against

Christianity. With respect to Islam, it hasn't gone very far and I believe that we are watching a swing back in the opposite direction.

I personally believe Putin will fail, which I am very grateful. I think, however, the process of trying to do what he wants to do will bring evermore evils in the short term at least to the peoples of the region - Muslim and non-Muslim alike.

Q: Let me ask - maybe - (inaudible) - not only to me but to all. I am from Voice of America, Russian Service, and we will do something for a Russian audience about this. And I would like to ask you to say a few words - (inaudible) - what do you to Russians - not here to Americans, but to Russians today.

MR. GOBLE: The first - I'll just say one thing very quickly. I would like to see translated into Russian and said in every school and in newspapers on a regular basis, Pastor Niemöller's observation from Nazi Germany: "When they came for the Social Democrats, they didn't say anything because I wasn't a Social Democrat. When the came for the trade unionists, I didn't say anything because I wasn't a trade unionist. When the came for the Jews, I didn't say anything because I wasn't a Jew. And then when they came for me, there was no one left to say anything."

That if I could just say one thing to the Russian people, that is what I'd want because what's happening - the moves against Islam and opening the door to moves against other faiths, other ethnic communities, and unless we speak out now about what is being done against the Muslims, we are going to see it visited on other groups, and eventually there is no one in Russia who will be safe.

MR. BATKEVICH: Yeah, just to dad that - I mean, there have been statements by some Russian Jewish leaders - Larry quoted Rabbi Lazar where they don't really show very much respect for other so-called non-traditional religions, and where they kind of - there was even an incident in Nyschanoger (ph) where Decon Korath (ph) who is mentioned here - he's a terrible anti-Semite and a major figure in the Orthodox Church -- was actually by the local rabbi there in criticizing protestant missionaries. The Rabbi made a decision that he was going to sit down with this terrible anti-Semite because he felt that these poachers, as they call them, were more of a threat to him than the anti-Semite. That's what I try to say when I go over there - that these communities that are victimized by often the very same people need to stand together and not be manipulated, but unfortunately, that is what happens more often than not.

MR. UZZELL: Can I have the microphone, please? If I could just say one thing to the Russian people: (speaks in Russian).

MS. GAER: And for our audience, do you want to - (laughter).

MR. UZZELL: Oh, I was saying that - I was trumpeting the Orthodox equivalent of Dignitatis Humane. Whenever I'm talking to non-Catholic audiences, I say they should read Dignitatis Humane, the Vatican II statement on religious freedom, which is a magnificent statement of religious freedom. The Orthodox equivalent of that was written in 1927 by Russian Orthodox bishops who were imprisoned on the Solovetsky Islands, which was really the beginning of the Gulag - the beginning of the Gulag Arkhipelag where Solzhenitsyn got the metaphor the Arkhipelag from in the Northern White Sea.

And this statement of bishops, most of whom were later murdered - were killed for their faith - is a theologically and morally sublime affirmation of freedom for believers of all faiths against the politics of collaboration which became the dominant mainstream policy of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Just the other week, I was asking a journalist in Moscow: well, how available is this text today? If you wanted to read it, could you in today's Russia? And he said, well, yeah, it's in libraries. If you're a scholar, if you're a researcher you can get it. But it's not something that is accessible to the average Orthodox believer. You could go into any Catholic parish anywhere in the world and get the text of the Vatican II. But this - it's a short statement. In fact, it's on our website. There is no reason why this should not be in brochure form in every Orthodox parish in Russia. But of course as long as KGBH is patriarch of Moscow, it's not going to be.

MS. GAER: I would to this by the way, the fact that we have to recognize that the situation with regard to religious believers has parallels in other areas of civil society -- that we have seen problems with freedom of expression, freedom of association - other freedoms that one hopes the Russian public will defend activity but which have been - have had a serious turning, particularly in the last couple of years. And that freedom of religion cannot be realized without other freedoms being there when you need them. And I thought that the point Paul Goble quoted - the Niemöller quotation, says it very dramatically.

The

other thing we haven't talked about at all here has been the way all of these trends seem to reflect the learning, the writing, even the scripts of the past, whether it's the past 70 years or the past 100 years. The one thing that is shocking about the letter of the members of the Duma - whether it's 11 or 19 of them - one of the things that is very shocking about it is the reversion to classic 19th century, anti-Semitic texts and tracks in that whole rather disgusting letter.

And similarly, the criticism of new religions - this argument about traditional religions and the like seems to be without a sense of where the world is today, where human rights are for everyone, and living up to what is freely subscribed to by the leadership - that is to say the international human rights instruments and obligations. Whether it had to do with freedom of belief or freedom from the destruction of life and normality that comes with terrorism - that there are standards.

Do we have further questions? Yes, sir.

Q: We've heard a discussion from certain - of what's happening within the Russian Federation and traditional religions.

MS. GAER: Could you just identify yourself?

Q: Oh - (inaudible) - International Academy for Freedom Religion and Belief.

MS. GAER: Thank you.

Q: I'm wondering what is happening within those areas of the country such as Dagestan, Tatarstan, The Republic of Bashkortistan, where they have majority populations that are Islamic, and how does that impact? And how does that tie in with the comment that by a certain date in the near future, Russia will have a very large population that is Islamic, and what does that pretend for the future? Is there going to be spin off? What is going to happen?

MR. GOBLE: Well, first - I'll speak to that. Some of the difference between the North Caucuses and the Middle Volga, which is where Tatarstan and Bashkortistan are, I mention in the text of my prepared remarks. In Dagestan, which was historically the center of the Sufi Tariqat (ph) form of Islam, what

you saw was an effort by the Muslim spiritual - the Republics Muslim spiritual director to take control and to engage in totalitarian actions against other Muslims. They were the first people to come up with the grand idea that we'll ban Wahhabism in 1999 and they have tried to get that extended to others.

There are - don't hold me to this exact number - I believe there are 16 leaders of Tariqat, the Sufi orders, within the community in Dagestan. Historically, the choice among the person you would follow was very free. What has happened with the statification (ph), bureaucratization, the extension of a Muslim spiritual directorate in Dagestan is that one of those is now trying to control everything. And that is - there is much less freedom in Dagestan than there was before. The consequence of course is that you have a lot of unofficial activity, you've got a lot of hostility between Muslims on the street and in the mountains of Dagestan, and this spiritual directorate which is state funded, state controlled - a KGB, FSB operation.

So you are watching the population which has historically been Sufi or traditionalist increasingly receptive to radical ideas precisely because they are being oppressed by a FSB creation - a Putin FSB creation known as the - (inaudible) - spiritual directorate of Dagestan.

In Tatarstan, you have a very different situation. The Tatars are historically the most cooperative of the Muslims of Russia. They are the ones who disliked by many central Asians because it was the Tatars who - (chuckles) - Russian power into Central Asia - helped Moscow extend its power into the country - into what are now the countries of Central Asia.

Tatar Islam is traditionally a very moderate form of the Hanafi legal school. It had been very seriously degraded. Before the revolution there were several thousand mosques, and mulashence (ph), and ulimar (ph), in madrassas, and trading facilities. This was all wiped out by the - after 1959, which is the last great wave of anti-religious activity in Soviet times. I think the number of mosques in Tatarstan was down in - it was four or five; they were very small. Most of the mullahs were killed; the madrassas were closed.

What you're seeing now is a revivalist - and the Muslim spiritual directorate of Dagestan was created largely by the state to promote the idea of how moderate Tatar Islam is. So the relationship between the Muslim spiritual directorate in Kazan and the government of President Mintimer Shaimiev are quite close and cooperate. You have a variety of Islamic ideas. The most interesting, although far from the most important in terms of numbers of adherence,

is related to a man named Ha'hin (ph), who is the head of the institute of history at the (Euro ?) Islam, who wrote a pamphlet called "Where is our Mecca?" suggesting that Tatar should be looking to West rather than to the Middle East for their future.

I didn't again have
a chance to touch everything that I said in my written remarks, but the Soviet system - (audio break, tape change) -- was founded to oppose the government. And so the government in Bashkortostan is interested in using the central Muslim spiritual director, which is one of the surviving four Soviet ones - this is Tajuddin's (sp) operation, another KGB genera - a man who can be counted on to say whatever the regime wants, whenever it wants, and to justify almost anything that's really quite obscene - he's the person that the Bashkir government wants to be close to, whereas the local Muslim spiritual director is opposed to the central Muslim spiritual director and also opposed to the Bashkir government. It looks to the Union of Moslems of Russia, which is an alternative all-Russia organization that's based in Moscow and it's a very different thing.

The reason that it is so serious
about how Muslims are treated is that if Muslims are seriously mistreated as they are now, and if it continues, a) they're going to be a majority and b) they're going to be anti-Western, and we're going to have a Russia that's a very different kind of place in dealing with the rest of the world than would otherwise be the case. It is not necessarily a bad thing if Russia were to have a Muslim majority. It's not the end of the world, okay? For many Russians it would be, but for many others it's not. But if the Islam that emerges is not part of this more traditional, populist, tolerant Islam, but rather a radical, anti-Western, anti-European, anti-Russian Islam because they feel victimized - and they have good reason to feel victimized - then you will have something really terrible.

Just give one
example of how bad things have gotten. Most Orthodox churches have crosses on them - you know, the famous Orthodox cross with the extra line on it at the feet - and in many of the older Russian Orthodox churches, at the bottom of the crosses is a crescent moon. Now that crescent moon comes from Byzantium. The crescent moon was never a symbol of Islam until Constantinople fell. The crescent moon was a symbol of the eastern capital of Rome and the Russians took it and added it to their crosses, because they wanted to symbolize the idea that Russia was the third Rome. If you read Father Koriath or if you go to the - and I've gone on the tour in Tallinn to the St. Nicholas Cathedral on Tompar (ph) -- you will be told that this crescent at the bottom of the Cross represents Russian Christianity's impending defeat of Islam. Now, when a large and increasing percentage of your population consists of the people who are going to watch the Cross stuck through them, let me suggest to you, that doesn't go over well. And it's a lie besides everything else. But it has been featured on the Russian Orthodox Church's main web page -

LAWRENCE
UZZELL: But actually, Paul, I've seen something almost the opposite in that I've seen Muslim rights groups complaining about this Cross offering the false history - that the reason why the Russians put this symbol of their Church is that it's the symbol of defeat of us well - (cross talk) - and then the Orthodox, I've seen Orthodox websites defending that, saying well this is a rival against us Orthodox, in the Byzantine -

MR.GOBLE: I understand, I'm only saying that
in the current environment, you're seeing the Koriaths of the world say this and they're getting a lot of play -

MR. UZZELL: And they should know better. They do know better.

MR. GOBLE: I don't know if Koriath does know better, but there are people in Orthodoxy who do.

MR.
UZZELL: If I could just add one more comment, I think there is a reason to worry about Russia becoming a majority-Muslim country. If you look at the indices published by groups like Freedom House, there are 47 majority-Muslim countries in the world. That region taken as a whole has less political and civic freedom than any other major part of the world and that's a concern. If you want to be an optimist, actually one place I would look at is Tatarstan. If you want to look at a polity, which is Islam, but where the Slavs and Moslems on the street-level among neighbors have pretty good relations, Tatarstan doesn't look so bad. But I think that it's impossible to separate that fact from the fact that Tatarstan has been ruled from Moscow for the last five hundred years.

MR. GOBLE: Well, I would argue that it's
precisely the good relations between Muslim and Slavic groups in the Russian Federation - have been more often the case than not until relatively recently. And the fact is, that under President Putin, that has changed because the confusion between ethnic Moslems and terrorists and Muslim religious has been changed and changed with official sanction.

FELICE GAER: Well, ladies and gentlemen, I want
to thank our three panelists: Paul Goble, Nickolai Butkevich, and Larry Uzzell, for an extraordinarily stimulating and important presentations today. I want to thank the US Commission on International Religious Freedom and the Kennan Institute for sponsoring this discussion. I want to suggest that we should all be advocating a census in Russia. I think we should all be advocating a close look at democracy and the elements that make up a democracy and the freedoms that are essential to having

that and how they interrelate. And I think we should be meeting again before long, if you have questions afterwards, I believe the panelists will be here for a little bit longer and feel free to come forward. And those of us at the Commission urge you to stay in touch and raise any questions you have. And last of all, I want to particularly thank Cathy Cozman (sp) from the staff of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom for pulling this meeting together today and for making it so extraordinarily stimulating.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

(END)