

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Vice Chair Felice D. Gaer has been invited by U.S. Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes to join the U.S. delegation at the meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on anti-Semitism in Berlin on April 28-29, 2004. The Commission has urged states to take concrete action, create a mandate to monitor and report regularly on anti-Semitic incidents, and review compliance on a regular basis. This is the fifth OSCE meeting in which the USCIRF has participated.

The Commission has emphasized that acts of anti-Semitism should be vigorously combated by states. "It's not hooliganism, it's human rights abuse," said Commissioner Gaer.

"The Commission has recommended that the OSCE pay separate attention to monitoring and combating the rise of anti-Semitism in the region." Calling the recognition by the OSCE of a resurgence of anti-Semitism throughout the region a good first step, the Commission has recommended that the U.S. government urge that:

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concrete action be taken within the OSCE to ensure that all participating states are living up to their commitments to combat discrimination and intolerance, in particular to combat anti-Semitism;

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a mandate be created within the OSCE, with the responsibility to monitor and report regularly on anti-Semitic incidents and the implementation by member states of their Copenhagen commitments to eradicate anti-Semitism and other discrimination;

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countries review compliance within the OSCE of commitments of member states on anti-Semitism on a regular basis.

The Commission has made recommendations relating to the work of the OSCE in both the general area of protecting the right to freedom of religion or belief and also specifically on combating anti-Semitism in OSCE member states. Commission participation increased in the last year, as the OSCE held special meetings devoted to both religious freedom and anti-Semitism. Commissioner Gaer made public statements on behalf of the Commission at each of these meetings.

The USCIRF has addressed anti-Semitism and related issues in the course of its work on several countries both inside and outside of Europe, including Belarus, Belgium, Egypt, France, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and Saudi Arabia. The Commission has also consulted with representatives of Jewish communities in several countries, other religious leaders, and NGOs. The Commission worked with the U.S. OSCE delegation to successfully urge member states to agree to hold the OSCE's first-ever special meeting on anti-Semitism in July 2003.