



UNITED STATES COMMISSION *on* INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

SUMMER SEMINAR SUMMARY **ANTI-SEMITISM**

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USCIRF's Mission

To advance international freedom of religion or belief, by independently assessing and unflinchingly confronting threats to this fundamental right.

On July 23, 2019, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) hosted "Anti-Semitism: The World's Oldest Hatred — New Again?" as part of its Summer Seminar Series. The seminar, led by USCIRF Commissioner Gary Bauer, brought together a panel of bi-partisan members of Congress, an Administration official, and non-governmental experts to highlight the disturbing resurgence of anti-Semitism around the world. The panel spoke at length about the myriad of challenges faced by Jews globally – harassment, Holocaust denial, vandalism, delegitimization of Israel, violence, etc. – with the aim of educating Congressional staff and the public on the history of anti-Semitism and its manifestations in our world today.



[W]e can make a strong case that the issue we're dealing with here today... in the months and years ahead... will make headlines either for ill or for good depending on whether or not we finally stamp out this ancient evil.

– USCIRF Commissioner Gary Bauer

Congresswoman Nita Lowey (D-NY-17) opened the panel by framing the issue. She spoke about “anti-Semitism flourishing around the world, particularly in Europe,” noting that in countries such as Poland and Hungary, the far-right political movement has brought anti-Semitic rhetoric into mainstream political discourse. She explained her role as co-chair on the Bipartisan Taskforce to Combat Anti-Semitism, and her efforts to educate the other members of the taskforce about anti-Semitism and its various forms.



“When society turns a blind eye to hate against one group, it becomes all too easy to become blind to all hate. This is why this is such a key issue.”

– Congresswoman Nita Lowey

Congressman Lee Zeldin (R-NY-1) described the perniciousness of anti-Semitism on the global stage, including at the United Nations (UN) and within the Labor Party in the United Kingdom. He argued that without sustained vocal opposition to anti-Semitism from all sources, “the issue is going to get worse” and “[anti-Semites will be] emboldened by what they get away with.” He also decried the UN Human Rights Council’s Item 7, a permanent agenda item that singles out Israel for criticism, despite no other country receiving the same scrutiny.



“We all need to work together in this fight, whether you’re in Congress or out, whether you’re Jewish or non-Jewish, regardless of your passions, your backgrounds, wherever you come from, this is a fight where losing is not an option, and I am honored to be in the foxhole with you.”

– Congressman Lee Zeldin

Former Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Rabbi David Saperstein gave a broad overview and historical perspective of anti-Semitism. He delved into the history of anti-Semitism in Europe, pointing out that European Jewry experienced hundreds of years’ worth of state sanctioned anti-Semitism due to the linkage between church and state at that time. He tracked harmful stereotypes that were formed centuries ago and spread to other areas of the globe, such as the Middle East, and continue to haunt Jews to this day. He also explained that with the introduction of the internet, the speed of radicalization and the dissemination of anti-Semitic rhetoric has reached a point where we are unable to keep up with the hate and combat those ideas effectively. Despite the difficult task, he praised ongoing global efforts to fight against anti-Semitism.

"I have been proud of the responses of the religious communities in the face of anti-Semitic acts - how they stood together not just to denounce them, but to clean up cemeteries, undo damage to synagogues, and open up worship space where these horrific acts have occurred."

- Rabbi David Saperstein

Tad Stahnke, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's Director of International Educational Outreach, focused on the current situation in Europe. He outlined the conditions on the continent that have contributed to an environment where people feel they can denigrate Jews with impunity, including political, economic, and demographic turbulence not seen for more than 25 years. He identified the three main sources of anti-Semitism - (1) right-wing xenophobic groups, (2) left-wing anti-Israel groups, and (3) new Muslim immigrant communities - and the motivations and manifestations of anti-Semitic rhetoric and actions emanating from each source. He related statistics about the extent to which Europeans agree with offensive stereotypes about Jews (a quarter of those surveyed believe that Jews have too much influence in business and finance), how Jews feel about and recognize anti-Semitism in their own countries (90% of Jews surveyed feel that anti-Semitism is growing in their country), and other issues such as Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism on the internet.

"If we think about history - economic turbulence, political extremism, identity crises, [and] demographic shifts - this is a bad cocktail for those who are vulnerable groups who can be charged with being behind these major forces that are wracking society. And Jews are typically the ones who are identified as being the cause."

- Tad Stahnke

The State Department's Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism Elan Carr delivered remarks that summarized the Trump Administration's efforts to counter anti-Semitism, which the president has referred to as a "vile poison." Special Envoy Carr reiterated the various abuses encountered by Jews in Europe, but also mentioned textbooks in the Middle East that inculcate anti-Jewish hatred in children and social media that is "boiling over with anti-Semitic hatred." He acknowledged the three sources of anti-Semitism that were previously stated, but insisted that all forms of anti-Semitism are equally repugnant. He concluded his remarks by emphasizing that he has been encouraged by the various meetings he has had thus far with foreign leaders around the world about cooperation on efforts to combat anti-Semitism.



"The weaponization of anti-Semitism by some does deep injustice to the fight that we all should share. So, to say that anti-Semitism is a problem on the other side is wrong. It's a problem on every side. We have to acknowledge that and fight it as one."

- Special Envoy Elan Carr



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