

REMARKS BY SPECIAL ENVOY HANNAH ROSENTHAL

“LEARNING FROM THE PAST, LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE”

THE SCHOOL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND DIPLOMACY

VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY, KAUNAS, LITHUANIA

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*(AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY)*

Good afternoon! Ladies and gentlemen, honored guests, I am glad to have this opportunity not only to visit Kaunas, Lithuania’s second largest city and its former capital, but also to come to Vytautas Magnus University. As an American; as a Jew; as the daughter of a Holocaust survivor; and as the United States’ Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, it is profoundly moving for me to visit Lithuania for the first time.

I was asked to speak about my work in the context of “Learning from the past, looking toward the future.” This vibrant educational institution -- filled with young people, yet located in an ancient city with a long, complicated history -- is a perfect place to examine this complex topic. Your institution’s history is both uniquely its own and one that mirrors the fluctuations of 20th century Europe: It was founded in 1922 in an independent Lithuania; restricted academically by the Soviets in 1940; closed altogether by the Nazis in 1943; reopened, renamed, but then closed again in 1949 by the Soviets; finally reestablished 40 years later, as Lithuania reemerged as an independent nation free again from foreign occupation.

As we move forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we must all continue to honor and study the lessons of the past. Only then can we truly claim our present and protect our future.

This morning, I visited the Ninth Fort and paid my respects to the more than 5,000 Jewish Holocaust victims who were imprisoned and killed there prior to the creation of the Kovno (Kaunas) ghetto. Your government is to be commended for establishing this government-protected memorial. Later today, I will go to the Sugihara House Museum – the home of the wartime Japanese diplomat responsible for granting transit visas to more than 6,000 Jewish refugees that allowed them to reach Japan and safety. In our hurried 21<sup>st</sup> century world, where everything seems to be instant and high-speed and available at the click of a mouse or the touch of a button, it is important to pause – to take time out of our busy lives to remember the past, honor its victims, and pledge to do all we can to prevent future acts of violence and hatred. However, it’s not enough to merely use sterling words to try to show the world that we care. We also need concrete actions. To quote Nobel laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, we must “create sparks in our hearts out of the ashes.”

As the President's Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, I am charged with both monitoring anti-Semitic incidents and combating such intolerance, with creating sparks in our hearts out of the ashes.

As a child of a Holocaust survivor, anti-Semitism is something very personal to me. When I was old enough to somewhat understand what my father went through as the only member of his family to survive, I asked him how he handled his guilt and kept his sanity. He didn't miss a beat and said: "I survived to have you, Hannele!" – so took that guilt off his shoulders and put it squarely on mine – and I have dedicated my life to eradicating anti-Semitism and intolerance with a sense of urgency and passion that only Dad could give me.

That path led me on January 27<sup>th</sup> to walk -- voluntarily -- through the gates of Auschwitz – under the infamous 'Arbeit Macht Frei' sign (deceiving the people entering Auschwitz that work will make you free). I went to Auschwitz as a member of the official U.S. delegation to mark the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz. As President Obama said in his televised remarks at the commemoration, the survivors of Auschwitz "are living memorials. Living memorials to the spirit we must strive to uphold in our time—not simply to bear witness, but to bear a burden: the burden of seeing our common humanity; of resisting anti-Semitism and ignorance in all its forms; of refusing to become bystanders to evil, whenever and wherever it rears its ugly face."

At Auschwitz, as I traveled on the soil stained with so much of the blood of the Jewish people, I wondered what it all means. The Holocaust was not only the greatest genocide in world history, but also the greatest theft of people's entire possessions and cultural and religious heritage. The Nazi's didn't just steal people lives; they attempted to obliterate an entire culture. We cannot bring back the dead from the gas chambers, extermination camps, and mass graves. But we can recommit ourselves to remember them, to do justice to their heirs and survivors, and to educate future generations about the Holocaust.

As I left Auschwitz to news of more anti-Semitic statements by religious leaders and anti-Semitic vandalism elsewhere in the world, I couldn't help but ask, "Did we learn anything?"

Traditional forms of anti-Semitism continue to plague societies worldwide. We are all familiar with ongoing hostile acts such as the defacing of property, desecration of cemeteries, and even physical assaults. Conspiracy theories continue to flourish, such as supposed Jewish control of the U.S. media and the world banking system, or that Jewish persons were involved in executing the September 11 attacks.

This past year was again marked by disturbing anti-Semitic incidents in Europe and around the world. Just in the last few months, we have seen neo-Nazis steal and destroy the Arbeit Macht Frei sign from Auschwitz, we have seen mobs desecrate Jewish religious symbols, cemeteries, schools and houses of worship. We have seen fire bombings of synagogues and schools. We have seen "death to the Jews" graffiti and even accusations that Jews kill children to steal their organs! We have seen national leaders declare that the Holocaust never happened. We have seen TV shows calling for new Holocausts to finish the job. We have seen cartoon contests using old Jewish stereotypes and equating Jews to Nazis. Has the world learned anything?

It's easy to feel discouraged that this issue continues to plague our societies, but it underscores the importance of the need to work even harder. Our job will not be finished until anti-Semitism is a distant memory. And yet the memory itself has profound value as it continues to teach us.

So, I am honored and humbled to serve as the United States' new Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism. I have the important opportunity to make a difference. The goal of fighting anti-Semitism is a high priority for the Obama Administration. We focus on what is going on in the world, regularly reporting on incidents of anti-Semitism and other human rights violations and abuses. I work with Embassies around the world, and non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and watchdog groups around the world to gather the information on 194 countries, including Lithuania, and each year we produce two major reports - the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and the International Religious Freedom Report. Both are on-line and can be easily accessed by any of you who are interested how your country and others are doing in protecting human rights and fighting anti-Semitism.

These reports tell us that many countries are pushing hard to advance human rights and fighting discrimination. It also tells us that there is so much more work to do.

Here in Lithuania, you are trying to examine the role and responsibility your country had played in the extermination of Jews during World War II, before and after. The Nazi effort to exterminate all Jews was well known - *Mein Kampf* was a best seller in 1933. So people knew what Hitler wanted to do. Never before or after the Holocaust has any country built death factories, and the success of their efforts has no equivalency anywhere in history. In Lithuania, Jews were almost 30% of the population in Vilnius in 1931. Out of 60,000 local Jews, 57,000 were murdered, some by Nazis and many by Lithuanian military units, auxiliary police, and countrymen. Of the 250,000 Jews in Lithuania, only 6,000 survived. The highest percentage of the local Jewish population murdered was in Lithuania, higher than anywhere else in Europe.

There are several stories of brave and honorable Lithuanians who assisted, sheltered and saved Jews during this mass organized killing spree. Many of them were killed for doing so - and 780 are honored as "righteous among us" at Israeli's Yad Vashem memorial to the 6 million Jews lost during the Holocaust.

How much of this history do the children of Lithuania know? Not only do they need to know the terrible stories of the extermination of Lithuania Jews, but they need to also know how important the Jews were to Lithuanian culture and history.

After Grand Duke Gediminas personally invited them to Vilnius in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Jews flourished with the other ethnic groups that made up the land of Lithuania. They built enormous educational systems, and Vilnius became known as "The Northern Jerusalem." Beautiful Jewish artwork was part of the Lithuanian culture. Jewish scholars and poets and authors lived in Lithuania. And had their families not left Lithuania due to persecution, Nobel Laureate in Chemistry Aaron Klug, and musicians Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen, and even the Three Stooges would have been from Lithuania!

So we need to teach the good, the bad, the beautiful, the ugly, the painful, the exhilarating, the truth about our history - so that we can design the future we want for our countries and our families.

In this connection, I want to say, as Special Envoy, that living under Soviet oppression for so many years was beyond terrible, and we understand the severity of your suffering. Everyone's intense pain is unique and needs to be acknowledged, and even honored.

In his seminal work "The Life of Reason", Spanish-American poet and author George Santayana stated "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." That is our challenge now - to learn from the past and prepare for the future.

I mentioned that my title has two very critical responsibilities - to monitor and to combat. How do I work to combat this age old and seemingly intractable hatred?

I hope to respond to anti-Semitism whenever and wherever it appears, and to work actively against intolerance through education and the promotion of inter-faith understanding. Anti-Semitism must finally be consigned to the dark annals of the past. We can do this by:

Diplomacy – The United States maintains as a top priority the raising of anti-Semitism in the context of our relationships with other countries. We encourage other governments to take steps against anti-Semitic manifestations within their own societies. We encourage appropriate outreach by governments to members of Jewish communities. We also encourage governments to partner with us in international institutions such as the UN, or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to those same ends. Governments can be part of the problem or part of the solution. We are ready to work with governments that want to be part of the solution, and call out those that don't.

Through our bilateral and our multilateral diplomacy, and through our assistance programs, we are working with other responsible governments, including Lithuania, to reverse disturbing anti-Semitic trends. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, with its path-breaking Berlin Declaration of 2004, has been a global pioneer in combating anti-Semitism, and is a major focus of our multilateral efforts. This year, Kazakhstan has assumed the OSCE Chair and will host a high-level conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination in June in Astana; we plan to attend and to launch a major initiative to advance Acceptance, Respect and Tolerance, The ART Initiative. And we look forward to continuing to work with Lithuania when you assume the OSCE Chair next year.

We work hard to advance civil discourse - We especially promote public discussion on the nature of new forms of anti-Semitism – how to recognize it and ways to combat it, working with NGOs and civil society groups to foster thoughtful and problem-solving discussions.

We work to advance education to opinion leaders and policy makers about the level of anti-Semitism and how it is becoming more widespread, working its way insidiously into mainstream media and public settings around the globe. This includes the reemergence of anti-Semitism in western media, as well as in Arabic and Farsi-language regional media. And even here in Lithuania, you have a growing number of websites that include anti-Semitism and

expressions of hatred. Such hate speech and even some with incitement to violence, need to be consistently condemned and shown for what it is - lies and hatred.

Building strong relationships across ethnic lines and with persons of other faith traditions is crucial to our success. As with any form of prejudice, anti-Semitism is often based in ignorance and fear. It is easy to criticize and even demonize people you've never met. Building relationships among different ethnic and religious communities is central to tearing down walls of hostility. With increased dialogue, there is less room for stereotypes to spread.

Education. Educating our young is a priority - they are our future and will shape our world as we face the future.

I was pleased that during my recent trip to Poland I attended a meeting in Krakow of education ministers from 29 countries. The conference focused on the preservation of Holocaust-related sites of memory and on tolerance education. Most of the countries reported great gains in their countries efforts to advance Holocaust and tolerance education. And most reported great strides in restitution to Holocaust survivors and heirs. I want to encourage Lithuania to complete this process that is now underway.

The OSCE has an office to develop Holocaust education and tolerance education materials in several languages. Another leading vehicle for Holocaust Education in Europe is the "Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research." Lithuania is one of the 27 nations encompassing most of Europe who make up the ITF. The educational focus has been on Eastern Europe, where more than 100 projects have been funded for high school teachers. This new program for Lithuania and others throughout Europe are heartening examples of education's positive influence. Unfortunately, education can be misused and perverted to encourage anti-Semitism rather than to promote tolerance. In secondary school textbooks published by the Saudi Arabian government, high school students are exposed to regular lessons about Jews wanting to control the world, and of always being greedy.

Children's educational TV in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other Arab Muslim countries depict Jews as descendants of apes and pigs, and urge children to shed their blood to kill Jews.

No government should produce materials that are intolerant of members of any religious, racial, or ethnic group, or teach such intolerance as part of its educational curriculum. The Department of State continues to focus on this important issue and express our concern to the governments using such hateful lessons.

The horror of the Holocaust is even used and abused. I mentioned Iranian President Ahmedinajad's statements denying the Holocaust and, of course, he also convened a conference to try to convince others to deny the Holocaust.

New technologies provide great opportunities to advance tolerance, and great challenges because some advance intolerance as well. Holocaust denial and promotion are not the only forms of hate speech in cyberspace, of course. As Secretary Clinton stated, "Hate speech that targets individuals on the basis of their race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or sexual

orientation is reprehensible.” Tempting though it might be to call for certain websites to be shut down or chat rooms closed, I believe in the old adage that the best antidote to bad speech is more good speech.

Hate speech, of course, reflects societal attitudes. The Pew Research Center is an American think tank based in Washington, DC. Last year, through its Pew Global Attitudes Project, the Center released some survey results on unfavorable views of Jews. The survey found that negative opinions about Jews are on the rise in many countries, including most European countries. For example, 46 percent of people in Spain surveyed held negative opinions about Jews in 2008, up from 20 percent in 2004. The French government recently appointed a special coordinator to deal with anti-Semitism and other forms of racism after a 100 percent increase in anti-Semitic incidents in 2009 – more than twice the number reported in 2008.

In Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon, more than 95 percent of people hold a negative opinion of Jews. This underscores the prevalence of anti-Semitic thought in the world that can often lead to anti-Semitic actions, violence, and deaths.

But there are some wonderful signs of creativity and thoughtful response to these challenges. There is a summer camp in Ukraine that has 200 children of all different ethnic backgrounds attend and learn how to co-exist and respect each others differences. There is an international Youth Leadership Project run by a Muslim American that teaches and practices pluralism to thousands of youth people around the world. There is a program called "Three Faiths Forum" in England that has members of the three Abrahamic faiths go into every high school class and they share the importance of their religions and the respect they have for each other.

Father DuBois of France is making a documentary and art exhibit about documenting the over 1000 mass graves in Ukraine and how the local communities are learning from their shameful and painful histories. There is the Interparliamentary Coalition to Combat Anti-Semitism that started in the UK and is now working with over 20 countries to investigate levels and responses to anti-Semitism. There is a group working to use the famous Babi Yar to develop educational tools and meaningful memorials.

And today, I am pleased to announce that the U.S. Embassy in Vilnius has received a 63,572 Euro grant for International Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research to develop a Holocaust education program with the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and other partners. This joint project will create a series of seminars on the teaching of the Holocaust in Europe for Lithuanian educators, specifically targeted to those training high school history and literature teachers. Each year, 20 university faculty members who train teachers will participate in a one-week seminar designed to broaden their knowledge of the unique character of the Holocaust and its role in European history, as well as its repercussions that deeply influence human rights education, policies and practices in today's world. The overall objective of the seminars is to build the capacity of teacher trainers to design and deliver a teaching program about the Holocaust in Europe. The program is expected to begin this year and last about three years. The plan is to craft the program so that it can be sustained beyond the period covered by the grant. So the U.S. and Lithuania will have a wonderful partnership in this project.

What have we learned in the last 65 years? That anti-Semitism is persistent; that we all must remain vigilant; that we can't dismiss statements as crazy and not serious; that we must improve educational systems everywhere and that new and different strategies must be developed and employed to combat anti-Semitism.

At the Department of State, we continue to fight anti-Semitism on all fronts - from annual reporting to international diplomacy, from law enforcement to education, from multicultural relationships to public engagement.

We are challenging public figures who spread misinformation about the Jewish people. When acts of violence occur, we call upon governmental authorities to condemn them and investigate promptly and will help with training for judges and law enforcement to make sure there is accountability.

And we'll work harder than ever at outreach across ethnic and religious lines, building our coalition of partners who will join us in this cause.

There is a tension with these issues between the universal and the particular. While the Jewish story is a unique one and anti-Semitism has unique aspects - and is a story that must be told - hate is hate and intolerance is intolerance. Jews cannot eradicate anti-Semitism alone. We condemn intolerance against any and all religious and ethnic groups. We must all work with each other to condemn anti-Semitism and all forms of hatred. It is the right thing to do, it has greater impact, and it meets the needs of enlightened self-interest. For when hatred for one is extinguished, life is better for all.

I look forward to working with you all as we join together to combat anti-Semitism and all other hatreds in all their forms. You represent the future; you are the future diplomats and agents of international relations. You will be the ones to engage in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy - the ones to build strong interfaith and interethnic relationships - the ones to advance civil discourse in the world - the ones to teach law enforcement how to be effective in fighting human rights abuses - the ones to lead educational efforts to make anti-Semitism something only found in history books. You are our future leaders and we are all counting on you to create new and innovative ways for all countries and cultures to get along, to co-exist, to celebrate each others' differences, to Accept, Respect and more than Tolerate pluralism and the world of the future. You will translate the lessons of the past to create a better and more creative world.

Thank you in advance for all you will be doing.