Co-operating to challenge anti-Semitic hate crime

10 November 2014
Shocking in its many forms, from crude cartoons to murder, anti-Semitism is far from being a problem of the past. Governments and civil society must co-operate to effectively oppose this contemporary challenge.
A worrying number of anti-Semitic threats and attacks have been reported across the OSCE region during the summer of 2014. Some civil society organizations contributing to OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) hate crime reporting have noted that the number of reported incidents that took place during the summer of 2014 was significantly higher than at the same time during the previous year.

Anti-Semitism often begins with chants or insults. Then it can escalate, moving from seemingly minor incidents to hate crimes. This horrifying spiral can lead to brutal attacks on people, including murders.

**What the OSCE has done**

OSCE participating States first condemned anti-Semitism in 1990 and have reaffirmed this position in many commitments and declarations since. Notably, the 2004 Berlin Declaration made it clear that participating States are committed to ending anti-Semitism in all its forms through a comprehensive set of measures.

To highlight 10th anniversary of the Berlin Declaration, a high-level event will take place on 12-13 November, convened by the Swiss Chairmanship of the OSCE, the Federal Foreign Office of Germany and ODIHR. The event will gather high-level governmental representatives and representatives of civil society for discussions about current challenges related to anti-Semitism.

These international efforts are very important, but the relationship between local officials and Jewish communities is crucial in ensuring their well-being. This was the topic of the 2013 Expert Conference on Addressing the Security Needs of Jewish Communities in the OSCE Region: Challenges and Good Practices. The conference brought together 102 experts from 27 countries who formulated recommendations to OSCE participating States, international organizations and civil society groups.
Securing communities

One key recommendation that emerged from the expert meeting was the need for close government engagement and investment in the protection of Jewish communities. Governments have an obligation to protect all of their citizens and to foster a sense of security. This is important to protecting religious minorities. It demands a careful balancing act: providing effective security without creating a siege mentality within communities.

Governments are most effective when working co-closely with civil society, notably non-governmental organizations and religious leaders. Governments have adopted different approaches, with many adopting comprehensive strategies to address this issue.

For example, in response to various acts of vandalism against Jewish property and places of worship, the French government ordered a strong police presence on the ground to dissuade further attacks. This was in addition to existing co-operation between the state and Jewish communities, notably special protective measures for Jewish schools in France.

Complementing these security initiatives, French leaders and politicians widely denounced all forms of anti-Semitism. Statements by national leaders are crucial to countering anti-Semitism; the message is stronger when it's echoed by civil society. The rally for peace and tolerance bringing together Muslims and Jews held in Paris on 3 August is a prime example of the civic action needed to stand together against anti-Semitism and religious intolerance. Yet, civil society organizations say much still remains to be done to ensure the security of the Jewish community in France.

A comprehensive approach

Anti-Semitism tends to attract more attention when there are spikes in the number of incidents. However, it takes long-term, meticulous work to build strong co-operation between authorities and communities. Establishing a permanent dialogue is vital to maintaining trust and eases difficulties in times of crisis.

In the United Kingdom, the Cross-Governmental Anti-Semitism Working Group brings civil servants from all relevant government departments together with Jewish community leaders and parliamentarians. This type of high-level commitment can then trickle down to the local level, creating strong links.

A clear and comprehensive strategy is essential to governmental efforts to challenge anti-Semitism. This can be accomplished with a number of different tools and mechanisms, but the common element to success is close co-operation between authorities and affected communities.

Ultimately, fostering a sense of security in at-risk communities depends on social mobilization as much as institutional action. The emergence of strong voices denouncing all forms of intolerance – such as was the case this summer – is critical to ending anti-Semitism throughout the OSCE region and globally.

Anti-Semitism

OSCE Combating anti-Semitism and promoting Holocaust remembrance
http://www.osce.org/odihr/antisemitism

http://www.osce.org/odihr/105253