

January, 2011

From the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti- Semitism (SEAS)

The SEAS Monitor

Dear Friends,

I hope that this message finds you well. I would like to wish you and your family a Happy New Year. Let's all hope that 2011 will be a year of good health, happiness and peace...

As we have done in the past months, in this issue of the SEAS Monitor, you will read what we have been working on in our efforts to monitor and combat anti-Semitism around the world.

Please feel free to distribute this with your friends, family, and associates.

All the best,

Hannah Rosenthal

<http://www.facebook.com/SERosenthal> 

In this issue:

- Diplomatic visit to combat anti-Semitism in Spain and France
- Visit with Holocaust Museum Leaders
- Alan Gross still sits in a Cuban Prison
- Award enables imams from around to world to visit Auschwitz
- State Department Employees receive training on anti-Semitism
- Anti-Semitism: a bi-partisan concern
- new on Facebook! "WHAT WE'RE HEARING"

Diplomatic visit to combat Anti-Semitism in Spain and France



Roundtable with members of Spain's Jewish community

During my visit to Spain January 17-18, I was able to meet with many people from inter-religious organizations, youth representatives, the media, the Jewish community, human rights activists, as well as government leaders. The Embassy organized three roundtable meetings—with representatives from the Jewish community, media and opinion leaders, and youth engaged in interfaith dialogue and promoting tolerance. It was an outstanding set of meetings that gave me an excellent overview of the situation in Spain. As you know, since Jews were told to leave Spain in 1492, there have been very few Jews in the country. But it seems there doesn't need to be Jews for anti-Semitism to exist. With over 30% of the people surveyed saying they have negative views of Jewish people, there is cause for concern. I found that there are two major challenges related to combating Spanish anti-Semitism. First, there is little distinction between Jews and Israelis; therefore many people who object to policies of the State of Israel hold all Jews responsible. Second, the media may be the most guilty of this conflation and fuels anti-Semitism by feeding society's ignorance through unbalanced information on and demonization of Israel as well as anti-Semitic images. Our meeting with members of the media discussed this at length, and I felt that some members understood better the importance of the distinction and the boundaries of when "others" are demonized and the ramifications of those depictions. Follow up meetings are occurring between media representatives and concerned members of the Jewish community – which can only improve the situation and understanding of all participants.



Roundtable with Spain's media and opinion leaders together with members of the Jewish community.

Another important factor distinguishes Spain from many of its neighbors. Unlike most of the other European countries, Spain is not engaging in ultra-nationalism and anti-immigrant fervor. To the contrary, I observed that Spain has generally welcomed the addition of five million immigrants over the last decade and appreciates its diversity. While there are some integration issues and difficulties in some communities, it is generally much better than we are seeing in the rest of Europe. I hope Spain continues to celebrate diversity and not fall into the “anti-other” wave surrounding it.



Shlomo Ben Ami, former Israeli foreign minister who now serves as Vice President of the Toledo International Centre for Peace



Roundtable with French Civil Society Representatives Promoting Tolerance and Interfaith Dialogue

In France I visited several representatives of civil society, government officials, the Jewish community, and UNESCO on January 20-21. Many noted that the government of France does not spread anti-Semitism and the majority of recent incidents of anti-Semitism in France occur among recent immigrant communities from Muslim countries, as well as extreme Right groups. As in Spain and elsewhere, I also heard many examples of anti-Israel sentiment crossing into anti-Semitism in France. I met with many of the organizations and individuals who are monitoring these incidents, combating them through legal cases, and raising public awareness to end hatred and foster mutual respect such as by educating schoolchildren, teachers, and police. Among these, I met with the Ministry of Interior’s Coordinator for the Fight against Racism and Anti-Semitism, Prefect Michel

Morin, who is coordinating France's national plan to combat anti-Semitism and racial discrimination.



Prefect Michel Morin, Coordinator for the Fight against Racism and Anti-Semitism, Ministry of Interior



Chief Rabbi of France Gilles Bernheim

The highlights of my visit to France included inspiring meetings with religious and civil society leaders engaged in interfaith efforts and important work to promote tolerance and mutual respect. One of the pioneers in these efforts is Rabbi Serfaty, president of the Jewish-Muslim Friendship Association of France (AJMF). In addition to his 40 years of work on what he calls “Judeo-Christian entente” and combating Holocaust denial, he works to educate people on Judaism and the Holocaust with a focus on growing Muslim communities in France. Over the last several years he has taken hundreds of French schoolkids to Auschwitz, Birkenau, and Jewish ghettos. With ten offices throughout France, the AJMF focuses on outreach to Muslim youth in France and has brought together an average of 12,000 to 15,000 people together each year, in cooperation with imams, facilitators, and psychologists. The Aladdin Project, an international NGO based in Paris dedicated to building bridges between Jews and Muslims, is also doing important work in Holocaust education. Many told me about Aladdin's co-organizing with UNESCO a major trip with political, religious, and cultural leaders from several countries to Auschwitz, which successfully took place on February 1.



Jewish-Muslim Friendship Association of France (AJMF), co-located with a Baptist church

Visit with US Holocaust Memorial Museum Leaders –



I was privileged to speak to Holocaust survivors, leaders, scholars, and activists in West Palm Beach, Florida about the important work of the Museum and the partnerships we are developing in combating anti-Semitism. Almost 800 people listened as I outlined the rise in anti-Semitism around the world, and gave chilling examples of not only the hate that is spewed, but the reaction of various organizations or governments.

Fortunately, I was also able to tell them about successes we have seen – with activists and media meeting to discuss perceived bias, with Holocaust deniers being moved out of positions of recognition, with countries beginning to come to terms with their horrid past and historic responsibility, with teachers being trained in Holocaust and tolerance education, with wide and visible condemnations of anti-Semitic activities by leaders from all sectors.



But in honoring the work we do with the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, I was also able to tell a personal story. As a child, I was aware of the Holocaust not because of a wonderful museum but because it was a household word, it was part of my identity, it was in my DNA. My lens of understanding was through the life of my father, Rabbi Franz Rosenthal. Other families had large gatherings filled with aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. My family reunions could fit at a card table with chairs left over.

72 years ago, my father and many of his congregants, were arrested on Kristalnacht and sent to Buchenwald. My father was the lucky one- every other person in his family perished in Auschwitz. We did not even know the dates of their deaths, so to mourn them my father would lead us in saying Kaddish on their birthdays.

Recently, my daughter Shira wrote her college thesis on my dad, and spent several weeks at the Archives in the Museum. She was able to find the actual deportation orders for my family members. I now know that my grandparents Mitzie and Heinrich Rosenthal died on May 28, 1942. And now I can say kaddish appropriately on their yahrzeit.



Sara Bloomfield, Director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Alan Gross still sits in a Cuban Prison



Judy Gross waiting for her husband

USAID Development contractor, Alan Gross, was arrested on December 3, 2009. No charges had been made for over a year, and now the Cuban government has charged him of 'crimes against the state' for bringing mobile phones and other technology to the Jewish community in Havana. On January 11, there was an interfaith service for his immediate release on humanitarian grounds. Since being in the Cuban jail, Alan has lost over 90 pounds, his wife has had to sell their home, and his daughter was recently diagnosed with breast cancer and is facing surgery and treatments without her dad. If this is not a humanitarian case, I don't know what is.

Faith leaders from the Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh communities all spoke and prayed for his well-being, his families continued strength and for his immediate release. On February 4th we were informed that the prosecutors are asking for a twenty year prison term for Alan. We at the State Department continue to work all diplomatic avenues available, and remain hopeful that there will be a good outcome soon. But obviously, we worry about his health, as well as his daughter's, and worry that the Cuban government will continue to drag its feet on bringing this to a resolution.

Award enables imams from around to world to visit Auschwitz

The Olender Foundation presented an award to Professor Marshall Breger and Imam Magid on behalf of the participants of the trip last summer to Dachau and Auschwitz with the imams and leaders of Muslim communities. The award will help pay for next year's trip with other imams from around the world. The Olender Foundation asked me to present the award, and I was honored to do so, as I was honored to be part of that historic trip. Stay tuned for more information about other activities that follow up on the August trip.

Click here: [Statement of Muslim American imams & community leaders on Holocaust denial](#)

Anti-Semitism: Interest is wide, concern high

January saw many meetings with a variety of diplomats and organizations. I was asked to speak to a wide variety of groups about my observations on the increases in anti-Semitism around the world. Speaking to the "Center Right" group, I saw firsthand how combating anti-Semitism is truly a bi-partisan concern, and several of the attendees have followed up with blogs and newsletters amplifying our message on the need to be vigilant in fighting against hatred of Jews and others.

I also spoke to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) leadership and not only shared my concerns but heard stories from them about what Jews are experiencing in especially vulnerable and isolated communities. Several students from the Union of Jewish Students in the UK came to my office to talk about what is happening on campuses in the United Kingdom. The bad news is that the students are experiencing increased tensions, hate speech, demonstrations, and sometimes even harassment. The good news is that the students are organizing and building relationships from campus to campus in England and are addressing the issues in a comprehensive way and are already seeing good results from their efforts. Frankly, it gives me great hope to see such focused and problem-solving young people taking care of very tough issues – and succeeding!

State Department Employees training on anti-Semitism

The State Department held its second major training on anti-Semitism in early February, with participants from posts around the world and from within the State Dept in DC. ADL Regional Director David Friedman helped lead the session, and he and I were both surprised at how many of the trainees knew how prevalent anti-Semitism is in many places. These trainings will help me gather important information from our 194 posts around the world – to keep me informed, and to help make the annual International Religious Freedom Reports and the Human Rights Reports cover more incidents, activities, media reports, and statements and reactions by governments, NGOs, faith communities, and civil society in general.

“WHAT WE’RE HEARING”

In addition to the monthly ‘**Monitor**’, starting in 2011, we will be releasing weekly “**What we are Hearing**” updates from around the world on monitoring and combating anti-Semitism, as well as updates about the work and accomplishments of our office. You will be able to find them on my *Facebook Fanpage* and your *Facebook Newsfeed*. We encourage you to visit often, share the news, and contribute to it.

Follow this link to my Fanpage:

<http://www.facebook.com/SERosenthal>



To a great New Year!

All the best,

Special Envoy Hannah Rosenthal