

May/June 2011

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

# The SEAS Monitor

Dear Friends,

I hope that you are all well! This is the May and June issue of “The SEAS Monitor.” It is a way for me to keep you informed about my work as the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat anti-Semitism. Please click for [previous copies](#).

Please enjoy and keep in touch.

All the best to you,

Hannah



[www.state.gov/g/drl/seas/](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/seas/)



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## EVENTS:

### [Honoring Father Desbois](#)



On Thursday, May 12, 2011, I presented a Tribute of Appreciation certificate in recognition of the work of Father Patrick Desbois, President of the Yahad-In Unum Association of France. Father Desbois has dedicated his life to identifying previously unknown Holocaust-era mass graves, countering anti-Semitism, and advancing Catholic-Jewish relations. Since 2001, he and his team have identified the remains of over one million Jews and Roma in almost 1,000 mass graves across Eastern Europe. The event took place in the Treaty Room of the U.S. Department of State. Click here for a brief [article](#) and the official [remarks](#).

### [Holocaust commemoration in the Marshall Center](#)

The [Office of Holocaust Issues](#) marked the International Day of Remembrance, Yom HaShoah, with a presentation by Rabbi Laszlo Berkowits, a Holocaust survivor. Rabbi Berkowits shared his moving story of survival on May 2 in the Department of State's Marshall Center.

### [Days of Remembrance](#)

On May 17, I attended the dramatic Days of Remembrance in the Capitol Rotunda, sponsored by the Holocaust Museum. Justice Breyer and Elie Wiesel spoke. In his remarks, Justice Breyer pointed out the strength of our government in dealing with the rule of law, and our government's role in establishing international law to hold accountable people responsible for genocide.

## [White House reception for American Jewish Heritage Month](#)



Also on May 17, President Barack Obama hosted a White House reception in honor of Jewish American Heritage Month. The reception highlighted and celebrated the history and unique identity of Jewish Americans and their profound and ennobling contributions to the American story. Invitees included grassroots Jewish community leaders from across the country, rabbis, Members of Congress, and a broad range of leaders engaged in business, the arts, education, and public and community service.

Read this year's [proclamation](#) and watch the video of the White House event [here](#).

### **INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH:**

#### [Middle East: Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Lebanon](#)

June was full of international travel. I was in the Middle East from June 6-13, visiting Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Lebanon. In Saudi Arabia I met with government officials, including Minister of Education H. H. Prince Faisal bin Abdullah bin Mohammad al-Saud, Dr. Fahad Al Sultan from King Abdul Aziz Center for National Dialogue, Dr. Fahad al Homondi of the Western Studies Institute and Minister of Culture and Information H. E. Dr. Abdelaziz bin Mulhayadin Khuja.

I also met with women leaders and representatives of NGOs and businesses. We talked about the need to combat hatred and intolerance on all levels. I discussed with the Ministers of Education and of Culture intolerance in Saudi textbooks and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion being taught in schools. I spoke with 11 Saudi



*Meeting with the Saudi Minister of Culture and Information*

religious and education scholars, some of whom were State Department International Visitor Program participants, about education reforms and teaching history accurately. The Minister of Culture and Information H.E. Abdelaziz Khuja commented that fighting hatred is a noble job, and that he hoped we could continue to work towards an educational system that is free of bigotry. Additionally, I met with Ambassador Hemayet Uddin, Director General at the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

I also met with Dr. Nada Yousef Al-Rabiah who is developing a Saudi version of Sesame Street. Our Ambassador, Jim Smith, and his wife, Janet Breslin-Smith, hosted several gatherings for me. Several of the participants spoke of keeping their children home from mosque because the sermons are full of hatred. They said, “Our religion has been stolen. Children’s joy has been stolen.”

In Jordan, I met with the Minister of Education Dr. Tayseer Nueimi and raised the issue of teaching the Holocaust as part of the Human Rights curriculum. The United Nations Refugee Works Agency (UNRWA) teachers union had said they refused to teach about the Holocaust because it "would confuse the children."



*With staff from U.S. Embassy in Amman*

UNRWA must use the educational materials of the host country, so this issue was highlighted in both the UNRWA and Minister of Education meetings. I also joined with Special Representative to the Muslim Communities Farah Pandith, where we spent a day meeting with youth groups, women's groups and religious leaders and met journalists and bloggers to talk about our [2011 Hours Against Hate](#) campaign. Additional meetings with opinion leaders and inter-religious organizations were more productive. HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies and its director Dr. Kamal Abu Jaber are creating curriculum and strategies to mix students of different religions and cultures. We heard: "I hate tolerance. I don't want to be tolerated, I want to be accepted."



*SE Rosenthal and SR Pandith talking with youths in Tafileh, southern Jordan*

Faith leaders in Jordan expressed concern about growing intolerance. Father Nabil Hadad, an Orthodox priest living in Amman, is working against hatred of Muslims and Jews by bringing youth together in exchange programs that our Embassy supports. Meetings with young men and women in Tafileh exposed the huge unemployment and financial crises they face. They were clear what they wanted: English classes, athletic facilities and continuation of higher education. "We lack everything basically." They are looking for ways to build alliances with others through cultural exchanges and micro-loan projects and they want more freedoms. The meeting in Karak at the Hayat Center for Civil Society Development highlighted the 2011 Hours Against Hate campaign. The overwhelming majority of the group embraced the virtual campaign and spoke of wanting to improve their lives and their communities.



*Meeting with Father Nabil Haddad in Amman*

Not far underneath most discussions in Jordan were anger, passion and misinformation about the Israel/Palestinian situation. Until a peace agreement can be reached, it will be very difficult to confront anti-Semitism and promote pluralism that will include respect and acceptance of Jews.



*Meeting with youth entrepreneurs at the Hayat Center for Civil Development in Karak*

To cap off the Middle Eastern leg of my trip, I spent a long but interesting day in Beirut with Farah Pandith. Farah and I spoke about the 2011 Hours Against Hate campaign with interfaith NGOs, academics and youth activists working to promote tolerance in Lebanon, a beautiful country trying to recover from sectarian conflict and political instability. We met with Professor Mohammad Sammak, Secretary General of the Christian-Muslim Committee for Dialogue, an NGO comprised of Muslim and Christian intellectuals and scholars from many of the Arab countries in the Middle East. Prof Sammak is trying to fight sectarianism among the youths of Lebanon who came of age during the Lebanese civil war when differences among religious groups caused such grave divisions in society.

We also met with Dr. Ziad Fahad of the NGO Dialogue for Life and Reconciliation (DLR), together with students of Notre Dame University in Beirut, where he is professor in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences. Dr. Ziad and DLR focus on healing from the long civil war and promoting youth contributions to local and regional society. As one student said, “Maybe we didn’t do anything to inherit Lebanon as a country of religious coexistence but we can do something to maintain religious coexistence.” Later, we met briefly with Elie Awad, the author of “Tolerance for Dummies,” who moved to Lebanon to promote and further tolerance in the Middle East.



*In front of Beirut synagogue*

Unfortunately, not too long ago, Beirut was home to a vibrant Jewish community of over twenty thousand, worshipping at 18 synagogues. But decades of violence and conflict led to a widespread emigration of Lebanese Jews. Today, there are no Jewish children in Beirut and the few Jews remaining live in secrecy. The ignorance and hatred of many is exemplified by the sad fact that the one remaining synagogue in Beirut (currently being renovated) was firebombed in 2009 and that anti-Semitic graffiti was scrawled on a nearby Jewish cemetery barely 10 days before my visit – and the police had not yet responded. I concluded my Beirut trip at ADYAN – a Lebanese foundation for interfaith studies and spiritual solidarity. We were briefed on their intercultural studies and citizenship programs. The good news is that they have a new class on Judaism as part of their interfaith studies; the bad news is that the class is taught by an Orthodox nun because they cannot find a Jewish teacher in Beirut.



*Lunch discussion with Notre Dame students*

## Europe: Lithuania and Belgium



*(L-R) Snipiskes cemetery memorial and Paneriai memorial ceremony; at the Kaunas seminar (far right)*

The second part of my trip took me to Lithuania, where I attended two memorial dedications at Snipiskes and Paneriai cemeteries, and spoke at the opening of the Jim Dine exhibit at the Lithuanian National Art Gallery (the artist is of Lithuanian Jewish origin). During my stay, the Lithuanian government passed landmark legislation on compensation of nationalized Jewish property. The law, adopted by Lithuania's parliament, solves the issue of simple justice and is a monumental and important step. I applaud the efforts of Lithuania's prime minister, parliamentary speaker and committees, and the Foreign Ministry in their search for a solution to this matter. People worked so well together recognizing that this is an issue of fundamental fairness and justice. I also spent an inspiring day in Kaunas, Lithuania's second largest city, with government officials and teachers taking part in a series of workshops on a Holocaust education. The Government of Lithuania has taken seriously the need to implement Holocaust education curriculum and this seminar was a conclusion of a months-long program; the group heard from participants in the Vilnius program from last December as well.



*Addressing the Conference of Jewish Media in Europe in Brussels*

My final stop was Brussels, Belgium, where I addressed the second annual conference hosted by the European Jewish Press on Jewish Media in Europe. Its theme, "What role for the Jewish Media in a world of growing anti-Semitism?" was discussed by several panels composed of government and European officials,

Jewish community leaders in Europe, Jewish organizations, and, of course, media. On June 21 and 22, I met with the Director of the Center for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism, members of the Movement against Racism, Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia, representatives from European non-governmental organizations, the Executive Director of Equinet, European Network of Equality Bodies, the European External Action Service, and the leader of the Union of Belgian Jewish Students.



*(L-R) Meetings in Belgium with Jewish student and community leaders, European NGOs, and MRAX*

## **MEDIA:**

### **Foreign Press Centers**

#### **New York**



On May 3, I spoke to a group of journalists at the Foreign Press Center in New York City. Attendees included journalists from the Turkish Journal, Art News of India, and Diva International from Switzerland. You can listen to the entire program [here](#) and see more [pictures](#).

## Washington D.C.



*Hannah and SRMC Farah Pandith*

On May 11, Special Representative to the Muslim Communities Farah Pandith and I had a discussion about our [2011 Hours Against Hate campaign](#) with journalists from Armenia, Spain and Turkey at the Foreign Press Center in Washington. SR Pandith and I launched our virtual campaign to promote tolerance and encourage youth to volunteer some of their time to help someone who is not like them. The Special Representative and I spoke about our experiences working together to promote tolerance and how the campaign came about. Click [here](#) for the readout of the entire interview.

## Film: “Auf Wiedersehen – Til We Meet Again”



On May 3, I attended a private screening of the documentary “Auf Wiedersehen – Til We Meet Again” by Linda Mills, about her family’s journey back to Vienna to revisit the memories of her mother and aunt, both of whom survived the Holocaust. The film emerged from the Mills family’s post-9/11 displacement in New York City, an experience which propelled the filmmaker to investigate her family’s flight from Nazi Austria. In the process of uncovering her family history, the film exposes Jews who interviewed other Jews for the Nazis and their role in deportations. Newfilmmakersonline.com describes the movie thusly: “Denial, memory and recovery play together in this absorbing, humorous and universally appealing story.” To learn more and watch the trailer click [here](#).

## DOMESTIC OUTREACH:

In early May, I spoke to **ADL** leaders in **NYC** on my observations in my first year and a half in this position as well as with members of the **Jewish Federation of Chicago** on their DC mission.

On a trip to the Midwest from May 18-20, I spent a day with **Congressman Keith Ellison** in **Minneapolis** where I addressed a Town Hall on anti-Semitism, met with interfaith leaders, and met with Jewish community leaders.



*(L-R) Imam Magid, Congressman Ellison, and SE Rosenthal in Minneapolis*

In **Chicago** on May 19, I was the keynote speaker at the **Professional Women's Leadership** conference for top women professionals in the Jewish federation system. In my address, I stressed the importance of not allowing a system, bureaucracy, or large donors to compromise fundamental values.

Next I went to **Madison**, Wisconsin, where I had the honor to address **Vantage Point**, a women's organization at their luncheon on May 20. The organization explores topics of the day, domestically and internationally. I outlined the six trends in the growth of anti-Semitism that I have seen and discussed some of the successful strategies to combat these trends, including my trip to Auschwitz with imams in 2010, the [2011 Hours Against Hate](#) campaign, requesting government condemnation of anti-Semitic incidents, funding translation of middle east media, and an innovative multi-media approach to Holocaust education.



*At the Paul Weyrich Lunch*

On June 1, I spoke about anti-Semitic trends in the world today at “**The Paul Weyrich Lunch**” in **Washington D.C.**, attended by Congressmen and staffers, think tanks, and policy advocates.

### [Holocaust Memorial Museum dinner in New York](#)



Credit: Michael Priest Photography

On June 2, I delivered the keynote address to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum’s annual New York dinner on the challenges of combating anti-Semitism and how the Holocaust Museum complements this effort. At the same time, the Holocaust Museum’s popular podcast series, *Voices on Antisemitism*, launched my interview, which I described in the *April Monitor*. [Subscribe](#) to *Voices on Antisemitism* as a podcast, or listen to my [recording](#).



Credit: Michael Priest Photography  
*(L-R) Peter Alexander, NBC News Correspondent,  
Sara J. Bloomfield, Museum Director,  
Hannah Rosenthal,  
and Tom Bernstein, Museum Chairman*

## **AT THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE:**

### **Foreign Service Institute anti-Semitism training**

I am involved in developing a major training initiative for State Department employees so they can better monitor what is happening in the countries where they serve, and sensitize them to the various forms of anti-Semitism. This will make our annual reports on Human Rights and International Religious Freedom more comprehensive, and allow us to do an even better job of monitoring and confronting anti-Semitism in all its forms. On June 2, I addressed a class of about 25 officers at the Foreign Service Institute, introducing them to my work as Special Envoy.

### **New SEAS Staff**

Now that it's summer time, I am pleased to welcome two new interns to my team, Ms. Yael Friedman and Ms. Elena Green. Yael, a graduate of Washington University in St. Louis, will start a dual Master's degree program at NYU in Education and Jewish Studies and Hebrew and Judaic Studies, with a specialization in Holocaust education. Her goal is to work on curriculum development for Holocaust Studies. Elena is currently an MA student at American University studying Human Rights, Peace and Conflict Resolution. Before attending American University, she lived and worked in Prague, Czech Republic as the Editor of a socio-political quarterly, *The New Presence*. Welcome to the SEAS Team!

## **SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH:**

### **Facebook**

I encourage you to “Like” my page on Facebook: Hannah Rosenthal Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat anti-Semitism. When you “Like” a page on Facebook, it will be listed under your “Activities and Interests” tab, which can be found in your Info section. If my page is updated, the update will appear on your News Feed on your homepage.

#### **Instructions:**

Once you are signed into Facebook, search for my name and title: Hannah Rosenthal, Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat anti-Semitism. The “Like” button is at the top of my page and has a thumbs-up symbol. The symbol disappears once you have “Liked” the page.