March 2013 Monitor

Dear Readers,

This is the March edition of the Monitor. It is also the first edition of the Monitor that I have released since becoming the Interim Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism. This edition of the Monitor covers my activities from October 2012 to the present.

The SEAS Facebook page is not currently being updated, but there should be a new page in the near future. In the meantime, you can “Like” the Facebook page for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. This page covers everything going on in our bureau, and will include events held by the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism. The Bureau’s Facebook page is www.Facebook.com/StateDRL

Thank you for your continued interest and support of our work.

Best wishes,

Mike Kozak

www.state.gov/j/drl/seas/

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Visit to US Holocaust Memorial Museum
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Staff Changes
On January 28, I hosted a commemoration of International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The event focused on a lesser-known aspect of the Holocaust -- the terrible genocide perpetrated against Jews, Roma, and other victims of the Nazis and their allies between 1941 and 1945 in parts of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. During this period, death squads of German soldiers and local collaborators carried out mass executions of millions of men, women and children, leaving remains in unmarked mass graves. This so-called ‘Holocaust by Bullets’ is the subject of a documentary produced by the European non-governmental organization (NGO) Yahad-In Unum. Former Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights Maria Otero gave opening remarks, discussing the Atrocities Prevention Board and its work to prevent future genocides and other mass atrocities worldwide.

Over 75 foreign diplomats, NGO representatives, academics, and others gathered in the Dean Acheson auditorium to watch the documentary film “Holocaust by Bullets,” followed by video testimonials of eye-witnesses to mass executions in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union during World War II. The lively panel discussion was moderated by Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues Douglas Davidson, with a distinguished group of panelists. The panelists represented a broad range of expertise and included Father Patrick Desbois, one of the founders and the current President of Yahad-In Unum, which identifies the mass graves and interviews eye witnesses (Yahad-In Unum means ‘unity’ in Hebrew and Latin). The organization's stated aim is “to substantiate this ‘Holocaust by Bullets,’ to irrevocably refute the Holocaust deniers of
today and tomorrow, to serve as a permanent warning to humanity of the dangers of genocide and to allow for the respectful remembrance of the fallen.”

The other panelists were Dr. Suzanne Brown-Fleming, Director of Visiting Scholar Programs at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and Victoria Holt, Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of International Organization Affairs, an expert leader for the Genocide Prevention Task Force that recommended the creation of an Atrocities Prevention Board, which the President created in 2011. Guests praised the program, with one participant, a lawyer who works on financial restitution for Holocaust survivors and their families, commenting, tears in her eyes, “This program reminds me of why I do what I do every day.” An article about the program appeared on the Department’s 'DipNote' blog on January 29.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

I was moved to be able to participate in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s annual commemoration of International Holocaust Remembrance Day on Friday morning, January 25 in the Museum’s Hall of Remembrance. In 2005, the United Nations designated the day of Auschwitz-Birkenau’s liberation as an annual day to remember the victims of the Holocaust. The program featured remarks by Irene Weiss, a Holocaust survivor, and a prayer of remembrance, as well as a moment of silence, a musical interlude and a special ceremony in which members of the diplomatic corps and Museum officials were invited to light a candle of remembrance with a Holocaust survivor.

Holocaust Remembrance at U.S. Diplomatic Posts

Our team encouraged and coordinated with embassies and consulates around the world to help them mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day. We sent DVD copies of the State Department’s MS St. Louis Program and a film about Petr Ginz a young artist who died in the Holocaust, to dozens of posts. Embassies and consulates used these materials to engage student groups, NGOs, and the general public in discussions on combating anti-Semitism, including Holocaust denial and revisionism, and preventing atrocities. Many other posts used material we provided to compose op-eds placed in newspapers on at least four continents. The U.S. Embassy in Cambodia used the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge to help young people understand the scale and impact of the Holocaust.
Human Rights Day

I celebrated Human Rights Day in December by participating in a panel discussion on “Human Rights in Hungary, Past and Present,” hosted by the Washington DC Jewish Community Center. Director Gabor Kalman screened his documentary film, “There was Once…” about a school teacher in Kalocsa, Hungary, who uses the town’s history to teach her students about the Holocaust and tolerance. Steven Feldman from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum served as moderator for the lively discussion that followed this powerful, poignant movie.

At the Department of State

Latvia

I met with Latvian State Secretary Andris Teikmanis on November 13 to discuss Latvia’s actions to combat anti-Semitism. While acknowledging his country’s history regarding its Jewish community, he cited Latvia’s Holocaust education in schools, efforts to restitute remaining
communal properties, and excellent relations with local Jewish organizations as measures of progress. I urged Latvia to be more proactive in combating Russian messages attempting to equate historical resistance to Soviet forces and current anti-Russia sentiment with support for Nazi and neo-Nazi ideals.

Hungary

Hungary’s Ambassador to the U.S. György Szapáry, accompanied by István Gyarmati, visited on December 13. We discussed recent anti-Semitic incidents in Hungary and I reinforced the need for government and elected officials to condemn these incidents quickly and forcefully. Professor Gyarmati, who is head of the Lantos Institute, noted that his organization is planning a conference on anti-Semitism this coming spring in Budapest.

Meeting with Jewish Organizations

On November 19, I hosted a quarterly meeting to report on my trip to the Human Dimension Implementation Meetings of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and discuss the U.S. responses to the rise of anti-Semitic, xenophobic political parties Golden Dawn in Greece, Jobbik in Hungary, and Svoboda in Ukraine. I am interested in learning more about how these parties are funded. We talked about concerns over threats to ritual circumcision in Germany and I shared information about the planned trip for imams to Holocaust sites in the spring.

International Visitor Leadership Program

The SEAS team and I are always pleased to speak with participants in the International Visitor Leadership Program projects run by the Department of State. On October 23, along with representatives from the Office of the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, I met Veronique Lefrancq, Counselor to the Deputy Prime Minister of Interior and of Equal Opportunity of Belgium, to discuss ways in which the U.S. fights religious and cultural discrimination while
respecting our First Amendment rights. Ms. Lefrancq will be advising the Deputy Prime Minister on how to create a national plan to combat anti-Semitism at the federal level in Belgium.

On February 13, I spoke with a group of French local government officials, NGO leaders and a journalist who work on cultural and religious diversity issues in France about freedom of expression and the missions of the Special Envoy and the Office of International Religious Freedom. They were interested in how to collaborate better with other faith communities and how to get children involved in alternate activities to counter extremist elements.

During the week of January 14, our team, along with colleagues from the Office of International Religious Freedom, met separately with three different groups of visitors on State Department-sponsored exchanges. They discussed anti-Semitism, religious freedom and interfaith dialogue with four parliamentarians from Hungary, two French civil society policy makers, and seven Saudi Arabian religious leaders.

**Briefing for Hill Staff**

On January 31, Representative Joseph Crowley’s (D-NY) staff held a briefing on the rise of extremist groups in Eastern Europe. Joined by representatives from the Council for Global Equality and Anti-Defamation League, we discussed the rise of political parties Golden Dawn in Greece, Svoboda in Ukraine, and Jobbik in Hungary. Questions focused on possible sources of funding for these groups, and on how the U.S. government can best respond to the rise in extremism in Europe.

**Civil Society**

**Hungarian Jewish Community**

On November 13, I met with Dániel Bodnár of the Hungarian Chabad community (EMIH) and Rabbi Slomó Köves, the executive rabbi of EMIH. They expressed concern about anti-Semitic incidents, such as the blood libel comment made by a Jobbik Member of Parliament earlier in 2012. They have created the Action and Protection Foundation, an organization to provide counseling, legal assistance, and physical protection for the Hungarian Jewish community, and told us that it includes board members from the different religious and secular Jewish communities.
I hosted Father Patrick Desbois and his colleagues from Yahad-In Unum on November 19 for a roundtable discussion with some of our colleagues from the European Affairs Bureau to learn about the work of Yahad-In Unum in Eastern Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union.

On March 10, I was a panelist at the Annual Policy Symposium for the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) Plenum. I discussed global trends in anti-Semitism and what our office is doing to combat its spread, and participated in a panel discussion with Jewish organization colleagues where we talked about anti-Semitism in the former Soviet Union, Europe, the Middle East and South America and took questions from the audience. My remarks can be found here.

The SEAS team and I taught modules on freedom of expression and anti-Semitism at the Foreign Service Institute’s classes on Human Rights in October and January.

The previous Special Envoy instituted periodic visits to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as a way to educate our interns and newly-arrived staff. I accompanied a November 5 trip to the Museum, where we received an introduction to the museum’s mission by Arthur Berger, Senior Adviser for External Affairs, and viewed the exhibits at our own pace.

We welcomed two new interns in January. Lillian Stewart is a senior at Louisiana State University, majoring in International Studies. Before interning with the Department of State, she was involved in LGBT rights activism at the state and local level. Ross Weistroffer is a senior at American University’s School of International Service studying History and International
Politics. He has previously interned for Senator Mark Udall and the Holocaust Memorial Museum, and holds a particular interest in genocide prevention and humanitarian affairs.

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Once you are signed into Facebook, search Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. 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.

**State.gov**

Aside from following me on Facebook, I encourage all of you to visit my page on the Department of State’s website (www.state.gov/j/drl/seas). You can quickly find my page by clicking here. Or you can follow these instructions: Begin by going to the Department of State’s homepage: [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov). Then, click on the “Democracy and Global Affairs” tab in the white toolbar. Then, click on “Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL),” and then click on “Monitoring and Combating Anti-Semitism” in the left vertical column. Here you will find information about my office, as well as remarks, press releases, past issues of *The Monitor*, photos, and information about the 2011 Hours Against Hate campaign.

**HumanRights.gov**

I also encourage you to visit HumanRights.gov, which is the U.S. government’s official website for human rights related information. You can access the homepage here, and you can access my personal page here.