November 19, 1999

ADLER PLANETARIUM AND THE MARS MILLENNIUM PROJECT

HON. DANNY K. DAVIS
OF ILLINOIS
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Thursday, November 18, 1999

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to recognize one of Chicago's premier institutions, the Adler Planetarium and Astronomy Museum, as they kick-off their contribution to the Mars Millennium Project and celebrate the grand reopening of their landmark building on October 1st.

Located on Chicago's beautiful lakefront, the Adler was founded in 1930 by Max Adler “to be the foremost institution for the interpretation of the exploration of the Universe to the broadest possible audience.” To help fulfill this mission, the Adler has become actively involved in the Mars Millennium Project using its StarRider(TM) Theater to transport visitors on a voyage to Mars and the former Soviet Union. The organization’s President and Chief Counsel, Mr. William Cohen, is frequently called upon in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom to provide expert information and testimony pertaining to human rights and anti-Semitism in Russia and the former Soviet Union. Mr. Cohen also serves on the board of the executive committee of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews.

The primary focus of Mr. Cohen’s advocacy “is to make sure the doors remain open for Jews and all persecuted minorities.” His recent report, “The Escalation of Anti-Semitic Violence in Russia,” demonstrates the level of danger facing Russian Jews in light of the increased frequency of anti-Semitic activity.

The report documents the chronology of the latest anti-Semitic events in Russia and the former Soviet Union. Anti-Semitism has never been reported in the media. Mr. Cohen has gleaned most of this information from clients seeking asylum or refugee status.

Following is the summary of Mr. Cohen’s report. I urge my colleagues to contact my office for the full report or the StarRider(TM) Theater in Boulder, Colorado, for a copy of the full report.

THE ESCALATION OF ANTI-SEMITE VIOLENCE IN RUSSIA

(William M. Cohen)

I. SUMMARY: ANTI-SEMITISM AND PERSECUTION OF JEWS IN RUSSIA HAS DRAMATICALLY ACCELERATED.

The Center for Human Rights Advocacy (CHRA) has been monitoring and analyzing social, economic, political, ethnic and anti-Semitic developments in Russia and the former Soviet Union (FSU) since its inception in early 1991. In addition, because of the persistent evidence and reports of anti-Semitism in Russia, the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews (UCSJ), of which Mr. Cohen serves as a member of the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors, has steadily increased its monitoring and reporting on human rights violations targeting Jews in Russia. In cooperation with the Moscow Helsinki Group, and aided by a grant from the United States Agency for International Development, trained monitors located throughout Russia now regularly report to UCSJ and CHRA on this growing phenomenon.

The persistent pattern of anti-Semitism and the pernicious practice of persecution of Jews in Russia was identified and summarized by CHRA in March of 1996:

This phenomenon (i.e., steadily growing anti-Semitism) is an atmosphere of economic hardship following the breakup of the FSU) is exploited by politicians and elected officials for political gain. It is manifested by acts of discrimination, insults, threats, and violence against Jews, Jewish property, and Jewish institutions. It is aimed at driving Jews out of Russia, picking a place for their colony, and establishing a Jewish community. Violence is employed against Jews and Jewish institutions. Such violence is exploited by politicians and elected officials to engage in such conduct encourages those who would persecute Jews to do so with impunity.

Since the economic crisis and the collapse of the ruble which struck Russian in August 1998, anti-Semitic expressions by leading politicians and elected officials, aimed at demonizing and scapegoating Jews, have dramatically accelerated. This increase in anti-Semitic rhetoric has been accompanied by a concurrent increase in the number of violent acts targeting Jews, Jewish property, and Jewish institutions. Such violence is now frequent and widespread throughout the vast number of Russia’s regions as well as in the major city centers of Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Nizhny Novgorod, the location of the three largest populations of Jews in Russia.

The frequency and ferocity of the various anti-Semitic violent acts appears to be accelerating. At the same time, the governmental institutions upon which Jews and other targeted minorities must rely for protection against extremist violence are either unwilling or unable to effectively provide that protection.

In addition, during the political and economic crises which continue today in Russia, anti-Semitic political groups, including anti-Semitic organizations and anti-Semitic rhetoric, have become more popular. Many of these organizations have increased the openness of their anti-Semitic expressions with little or no effective action by government authorities to deter them. Under these circumstances, Jews in Russia continue to be vulnerable to anti-Semitic discrimination, violence, and persecution without effective protection. As a result of this increase, Jews in Russia have become more fearful and are, therefore, more vulnerable to anti-Semitism.

Indeed, the risk to Jews in Russia today is greater than at any time since the breakup of the Soviet Union. The Russian government has so far demonstrated that it is both unwilling and unable to deter growing anti-Semitism, which continues to grow dramatically.

Faced with escalating anti-Semitic violence combined with indifference to these attacks by the general Russian populace, political exploitation of the phenomenon and government indifference to protect them, the Jewish community has resorted to funding its own security for Jewish institutions and to Western governments and non-governmental human rights organizations for help. Increasingly more Jews are also leaving Russia and the FSU permanently for Israel, the United States and other countries where they will be free from persecution because of their Jewish religion and nationality.

Absent a dramatic change in the economic, social and political climate in Russia, it is highly unlikely that the current atmosphere of openness and violently expressed anti-Semitism will diminish any time soon. To the contrary, the escalating incidents combined with government silence and ineffective law enforcement indicate that Jews are at great risk in Russia today and for the foreseeable future.

This report will first document the chronology of recent anti-Semitic events which demonstrate both the increased frequency and level of danger which accompanies them...