

# U.S. SENATE PRESSES RUSSIA: CONFRONT THE MENACE OF ANTI-SEMITISM

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

June 18, 1999

President Boris Yeltsin  
Russian Federation  
The Kremlin  
Moscow, Russia

Dear President Yeltsin:

We are writing to you to express our serious concerns over the rise in anti-Semitic rhetoric heard at both the national and local levels of Russian society and politics. We strongly believe that the first line of defense against the growth of anti-Semitism in your country is exposing and condemning the hate-filled rhetoric at all levels of contact between our two governments.

As you know, recent events and remarks in Russia have marred this decade's reemergence of Jewish life in post-communist Russia. The Russian Jewish community now numbers upwards of one million, and the opening of synagogues, schools and community centers has been a bright counterpoint to the centuries of violence and anti-Semitic laws against the Russian Jewish community. We strongly feel that the recent spate of anti-Semitic rhetoric, in particular those comments from Russian communist and extremist/nationalist political groups, should be disavowed. In particular, the fascist extremism exhibited by Alexander Barkashov's Russia National Unity Party is alarming in its use of slanderous stereotyping and crude scapegoating.

Recently, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's Subcommittee on European Affairs held a hearing on the rise of anti-Semitism in Russia. This was not the first hearing on this subject—in fact, the Senate held hearings and considered resolutions regarding the treatment of Jews in Tsarist Russia as early as 1879. Over the years it has not been unusual for the United States to act on this subject, linking American foreign policy with what should now be regarded as a cornerstone of human rights policies in Russia.

While we support a strong effort to address the economic difficulties in Russia and encourage the development of a strong, market-oriented economy, we want you to know that the United States also expects from Russia a strong commitment to human rights and religious freedom. As your country enters an election cycle, there may well be temptations to sound ultra-nationalist themes that attempt to blame the small Jewish community for Russia's problems.

President Yeltsin, we believe it is imperative that you demonstrate, through your emphatic disagreement with those who espouse anti-Semitism in Russia, your understanding of the importance the Russian government places upon religious freedom. The United States predicates its support for democratic institutions in Russia upon unwavering opposition to anti-Semitism at any level, in any form. While we are pleased by your administration's statements against anti-Semitism, the horrific explosions near two of Moscow's largest synagogues on May 1 and the recent attacks on the only synagogue in Birobidzhan, are reason enough for further vigorous and more public condemnation.

We hope you share our deep concern for this issue and look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

Gordon H. Smith (R - OR)

Joseph R. Biden Jr. (D - DE)

Spencer Abraham (R - MI)  
Daniel Akaka (D - HI)  
Wayne Allard (R - CO)  
John Ashcroft (R - MO)  
Max Baucus (D - MT)  
Evan Bayh (D - IN)  
Robert Bennett (R - UT)  
Jeff Bingaman (D - NM)  
Christopher Bond (R - MO)  
Barbara Boxer (D - CA)  
John Breaux (D - LA)  
Sam Brownback (R - KS)  
Richard Bryan (D - NV)  
Jim Bunning (R - KY)

Conrad Burns (R - MT)  
Robert Byrd (D - WV)  
Ben Nighthorse Campbell (R - CO)  
John Chafee (R - RI)  
Max Cleland (D - GA)  
Thad Cochran (R - MS)  
Susan Collins (R - ME)  
Kent Conrad (D - ND)  
Paul Coverdell (R - GA)  
Larry Craig (R - ID)  
Mike Crapo (R - ID)  
Thomas Daschle (D - SD)  
Mike DeWine (R - OH)  
Christopher Dodd (D - CT)

Pete Domenici (R - NM)  
Byron Dorgan (D - ND)  
Richard Durbin (D - IL)  
John Edwards (D - NC)  
Michael Enzi (R - WY)  
Russ Feingold (D - WI)  
Dianne Feinstein (D - CA)  
Peter Fitzgerald (R - IL)  
Bill Frist (R - TN)  
Slade Gorton (R - WA)  
Bob Graham (D - FL)  
Phil Gramm (R - TX)  
Rod Grams (R - MN)  
Charles Grassley (R - IA)

Judd Gregg (R - NH)  
Tom Harkin (D - IA)  
Orin Hatch (R - UT)  
Jesse Helms (R - NC)  
Ernest Hollings (D - SC)  
Kay Hutchinson (R - AR)  
James Inhofe (R - OK)  
David Iinoye (D - HI)  
Jim Jeffords (R - VT)  
Tim Johnson (D - SD)  
Edward Kennedy (D - MA)  
Bob Kerrey (D - NE)  
John Kerry (D - MA)

Herbert Kohl (D - WI)  
Jon Kyl (R - AZ)  
Mary Landrieu (D - LA)  
Frank Lautenberg (D - NJ)  
Patrick Leahy (D - VT)  
Carl Levin (D - MI)  
Joseph Lieberman (D - CT)  
Blanche Lincoln (D - AR)  
Trent Lott (R - MS)  
Richard Lugar (R - IN)  
Connie Mack (R - FL)  
John McCain (R - AZ)  
Mitch McConnell (R - KY)  
Barbara Mikulski (D - MD)

Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D - NY)  
Frank Murkowski (R - AK)  
Patty Murray (D - WA)  
Don Nickles (R - OK)  
Jesse Reed (D - RI)  
Harry Reid (D - NV)  
Charles Robb (D - VA)  
Pat Roberts (R - KS)  
John Rockefeller IV (D - WV)  
William Roth Jr. (R - DE)  
Rick Santorum (R - PA)  
Paul Sarbanes (D - MD)  
Charles Schumer (D - NY)  
Jeff Sessions (R - AL)

Richard Shelby (R - AL)  
Robert Smith (R - NH)  
Olympia Snowe (R - ME)  
Arlen Specter (R - PA)  
Ted Stevens (R - AK)  
Fred Thomas (R - TN)  
Fred Thompson (R - TN)  
Strom Thurmond (R - SC)  
Robert Torricelli (D - NJ)  
George Voinovich (R - OH)  
John Warner (R - VA)  
Paul Wellstone (D - MN)  
Ron Wyden (D - OR)

Anti-Semitism in Russia has deep and deadly roots. And when times are hard in Russia, as they are now, old habits of anti-Semitism gain ground. Prominent Russian political figures and publications spew hatred of Jews, and threats of violence loom. The warning signs are clear; they must not be ignored.

The American Jewish Committee, together with the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, thanks the United States Senate, in particular Senators Gordon Smith and Joseph Biden, for sending this urgent message to President Yeltsin: Confront the menace of anti-Semitism now.

## The American Jewish Committee

Bruce M. Ramer  
President

David A. Harris  
Executive Director

Founded in 1906 in response to the murderous assaults on Jews in Tsarist Russia, the American Jewish Committee seeks to ensure the well-being and security of Jewish communities around the world, advance understanding of Israel, and promote democratic values and intergroup cooperation.

For further information or to request reprints of this message, please contact us at:  
The Jacob Blaustein Building, 165 East 56 Street, New York, NY 10022-2746. Or visit our Website: [www.ajc.org](http://www.ajc.org)