



human rights *first*

THE NEW NAME OF

LAWYERS COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

March 24, 2004

The Honorable Colin L. Powell
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Powell:

I am writing to express our deep dismay that you have decided not to attend the upcoming Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) conference in Berlin on antisemitism, or to send another senior State Department official. This letter follows up on my earlier letter to you and the response I received from Ambassador Edward B. O'Donnell (copies attached).

Ambassador O'Donnell's letter says that you see the Berlin conference as "an important event in the struggle against anti-Semitism." He writes: "I can assure you that the United States Government will spare no effort to promote a successful outcome in Berlin."

With due respect, your decision not to attend personally, or to send either Deputy Secretary Armitage or Under Secretary Grossman, flies in the face of those assertions. The absence of a senior U.S. Government official at the meeting leaves a huge void. It sends a signal that the U.S. Government's priorities lay elsewhere. And it almost certainly will encourage European Governments, particularly those who are least committed to the meeting's agenda, to send less senior delegations as well.

As you know well there has been an alarming rise in antisemitism in Europe, including many violent acts like the incidence of vandalism and arson at a Jewish community center in southeastern France earlier this week. Most European governments have failed to take appropriate steps to combat these horrendous actions. The U.S. Government can and should be doing everything in its power to press for a more urgent response by the European states.

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The Berlin meeting of the OSCE is an important substantive meeting among European governments and other members of the OSCE aimed at developing specific policies and responses to antisemitism. Human Rights First intends to join other leading non-governmental organizations in Berlin. For the meeting to produce a positive outcome, the U.S. Government must be in a position to exert maximum diplomatic leverage. Your presence, or that of the Deputy Secretary or Under Secretary, would provide that needed leadership. We strongly urge you to reconsider your decision.

Sincerely,

Mike Posner

Michael Posner
Executive Director