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The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

May 21, 2013 - Budapest

Dear Secretary Kerry,

Dear Jewish leaders,

The Hungarian Jewish community was surprised to learn only from media sources that some respected Jewish organizations in the United States have turned to the United States' secretary of state in the matter of anti-Semitism in Hungary. As we see it, the organizations took up the issue with the secretary of state in order to insure that the ministry keeps the matter on the agenda in the course of its intergovernmental discussions.

There can be no doubts with regard to the good intentions and possible positive outcomes of the initiative. We are all aware that it is never enough of the fight against hatred. There is no upper limit to taking a stand when such important moral issues are at stake. It is crucial that every follower of the concept of liberal democracy take a stand against those who spread their ideas through hate speech.

At the same time we believe it is of measurable importance, that in order to achieve the desired result through learning from the mistakes of the past, the Hungarian Jewish community grows up to a state of maturity. And maturity means that it must begin to take responsibility for its own actions in effect.

It is indispensable to develop active relations between international organizations and the local Jewish community for the sake of handling the current challenges with the adequate sensitivity and within the framework of the appropriate context. It is also of high importance to make sure that we should be all able to focus on actual dangers that arise and to ring the watch-bell with full responsibility rather than voice general. This strategy would enable us to avoid such fiascos of which we can find a prime example in the general assembly of the World Jewish Congress in Hungary, in April 2013, when the congress and its president first resolutely denounced the Hungarian government for its indecisive action on anti-Semitism, and then publicly apologized for the "overstated" criticism.

The Hungarian Jewish community, numbering approximately one-hundred thousand, is the oldest Jewish Community in the European Union in the sense that it is the only significant Jewish community which has lived in its homeland for at least two-hundred years. The losses of the Hungarian Jewish community in 1944 came to nearly six-hundred thousand in the time span of a little over sixty days. Hungarian local authorities had a key role in the deportation of these six-hundred thousand persons following the German occupation. Even we, local Jews are not able to



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muster surprise that the trauma has since not been fully processed. Here, the persecutor and the persecuted live in the same neighborhood.

A peculiar traumatic effect was created in 1989-90, after of the years of pretence of peace under communist rule, after years the years of forced silence, when along with free speech, the catch phrases of anti-Semitism, that had been thought long forgotten (though today we might well understand them to have only been repressed and swept under the carpet) once again appeared at the public foreground. The quality of public discussion and political discourse has only wilted ever since and—though occurrences of physical atrocity are still fewer than in the west—certain exclusionist and anti-Semitic phrases are becoming increasingly widely accepted. The even stronger spread of these views since the public presence of the extreme-right Jobbik party, which openly makes public statements that are exclusionary and anti-Semitic, poses a serious challenge.

The Hungarian Jewish community as well as the benevolent majority is faced with a serious challenge when it comes to handling this increasingly disturbing situation, especially in light of the fact that the external criticism directed at the Hungarian government and the general trend of democratic deficit are connected to the issue of anti-Semitism even where there is no connection whatsoever.

There is also a counterpoint to the worrying trends. Some important steps forward have been taken recently, primarily in the field of legal measures that can be taken against anti-Semitic and hate speech. Meanwhile the task of uprooting prejudices alive in the Hungarian society at large is unavoidably left to the educational system, since the most fertile ground for hatred is ignorance, which is especially worrying in regard to these matters. A common and comprehensive national consensus that is knowledge-based and viscerally excludes unacceptable speech is still only to come.

In this situation it is our conviction that our aims can only be carried forward through active and unequivocally constructive dialogue. The Action and Protection Foundation was formed nearly a year ago with this aim. The foundation has taken up the task of professionally monitoring anti-Semitism, taking action against anti-Semitic verbal and physical atrocities, serving the cause of education and the improvement of the legislative context. The members of the Board of Trustees of the foundation include representatives of the three major Jewish communities as MAZSIHISZ, EMIH – Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation (Chabad), Sim Shalom - Progressive Jewish Congregation and members of Jewish civil life as well as secular Jewish public life. For it is our conviction that only one way leads the eradication of hatred: the path of the broadest possible discourse. This discussion is indispensable in every area: between the Jewish community and the wider Hungarian public, between the Jewish community and the Hungarian government. It is also of utmost importance to commence these dialogues within the Jewish community itself and between the Hungarian Jewish community and the international Jewish organizations. Nothing illustrates the fact that the Hungarian Jewish community has attained maturity better than that it formulates opinions about its important matters, and in the best instances, also comes to decisions on them.



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Dear Secretary Kerry,

The earnest commitment of the United States of America to democratic values and human rights is an important guarantee. To put it differently, it is both a point of reference and protective net for us, it is at least as important that your colleagues at the State Department concerned in our matters receive our communications with the greatest possible openness, understanding and a pro-active attitude. This active, professional and direct contact is certainly a guarantee for the availability of the information required to take decisive and balanced action against the growing anti-Semitism which affects the Jews living in Hungary.

Sincerely,

Dániel Bodnár

Chairmen of the Board of Trustees

András Heisler

Member of the governing body of MAZSIHISZ,

member of the Board of Trustees

Gergely Guba

Leader of Szim Salom PZSH,

member of the Board of Trustees