



**Statement of Senator Benjamin L. Cardin
OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
Special Representative on Anti-Semitism, Racism and Intolerance**

Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Bureau

April 27, 2020

Mr. President, Secretary General Montella, thank you for giving me the opportunity to participate in this Bureau meeting.

I commend you for your efforts to ensure that the work of the Assembly continues and that this body responds to the urgent challenges all of our countries face. I particularly welcome the information you have put online about the participating States' responses to the covid-19 pandemic and the role of legislative bodies in formulating those responses. Parliamentary oversight is essential, not expendable, in an emergency.

Since my last report in Luxembourg, I have focused on the profound threat of rising and increasingly deadly intolerance. Anti-Semitic, racist and xenophobic attacks in my own country, at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh and the targeted killings of Latin Americans in El Paso, Texas, underscore the urgency of this threat. Obviously, the pandemic creates new and additional challenges. But it is precisely at this moment that we cannot afford to lower our guard against discrimination and bigotry, when pandemic fears may fan the flames of intolerance.

Minority and immigrant communities are already more vulnerable to the impact of the pandemic because of past inequalities. Those disparities may be compounded without appropriately targeted healthcare and economic responses. Covid-caused disruptions in education may also have long-term disproportionate consequences for those already impacted by discriminatory schooling.

As parliamentarians, we have a responsibility to ensure that the measures we introduce and which our governments implement are consistent with OSCE standards on human rights and democracy, including the 1991 Moscow Document's commitments regarding states of emergency. It is also vital that our parliamentary oversight extends to the use of military authorities and policing, which may have the potential to exacerbate relations with minority communities and erode public confidence in government at a time when that trust is critical for the effective implementation of responses to this virus. Disciplinary and punitive policies by national or local authorities run the risk of backfiring.

As this body's special representative on anti-Semitism and racism, I am alarmed by attacks on people who are being scapegoated for this virus. Parliamentarians should lead by example in countering disinformation, conspiracy theories, and other propaganda that stokes anti-Asian bigotry, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and other forms of racism.

In the face of an extraordinary threat, people may feel that ordinary constraints on governments do not apply. But too often, temporary changes introduced for emergencies have a way of becoming permanent. I welcome the statements by my Third Committee colleagues that have called for the participating States' responses to meet the basic tests of necessity, transparency, and proportionality. It is also crucial that they include sunset provisions and subject to periodic review. When democratic norms erode, protections against hate crimes do too.

Mr. President, I will be reporting more fully on my activities later this year at a more opportune time, when we will all be able to assess the very fluid, unfolding challenges. Covid-19 will undoubtedly lead to profound changes in all our countries for a long time to come. I thank you and my colleagues here today for the work you are doing to ensure that we meet a global crisis with global cooperation faithful to the commitments we have undertaken in the OSCE.