

US Names Envoy to Combat Anti-Semitism

The United States on Monday appointed a special envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism as a new State Department report warned about incidents in Venezuela, Egypt and Iran.

Secretary of State John Kerry named Ira Forman, a long time director of the National Jewish Democratic Council, as special envoy citing a “troubling trend” of anti-Semitism around the world. Forman succeeds Hannah Rosenthal, who stepped down last year.

The 2012 report on religious freedom said an increase worldwide in anti-Semitism was “of great concern.”

“When political leaders condoned anti-Semitism, it set the tone for its persistence and growth in countries around the world,” the report said. “Of great concern were expressions of anti-Semitism by government officials, by religious leaders and by the media, particularly in Venezuela, Egypt and Iran. At times, such statements led to desecration and violence.”

In Venezuela, the report said state-controlled media published numerous anti-Semitic statements, in particular aimed at opposition presidential candidate Henrique Capriles, a devout Catholic who has Jewish ancestors.

Capriles was narrowly defeated by President Nicolas Maduro in the April 19 vote and is contesting the result in the nation’s top court. Capriles’ maternal grandparents, the Radonskis, fled anti-Semitism in Poland.

The report said anti-Semitic sentiment in the media was widespread and cited anti-Semitic comments by Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi and officials from the Muslim Brotherhood.

In Iran, the government regularly vilified Judaism, the report said. It said vandals desecrated several Holocaust memorials in Ukraine, and in May vandals painted swastika on a St Petersburg synagogue's fence and on a synagogue in Irkutsk, Russia.

In addition, the report also singled out China, North Korea, Vietnam, Myanmar, Saudi Arabia and Syria for undermining or attacking religious freedom. Criticism against Myanmar, also known as Burma, comes as its President Thein Sein visits Washington.

Kerry said the annual report was an attempt to make progress in the fight for more religious freedom around the world "even though we know that it may cause some discomfort."

"When countries undermine or attack religious freedom, they not only unjustly threaten those whom they target; they also threaten their country's own stability," he added.