

REMARKS BY RABBI ARTHUR SCHNEIER  
APPEAL OF CONSCIENCE FOUNDATION ANNUAL AWARD DINNER  
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 10, 1991 - The Pierre Hotel, New York City

Last Saturday night I stood at the ravine at Babi Yar with leaders of the Ukraine, Soviet Union and Government representatives of the United States, Germany and Israel at the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the massacre of over 200,000 Jews, Ukrainians, Gypsies and others. We stood there with the haunting realization that the murder at Babi Yar represented the consequences of racism, anti-Semitism and other forms of ethnic and religious hatred. And yet the phantom of xenophobia -- fear and hatred of the stranger -- is stalking Europe. Again, a *deja vu* of the 1930's, perhaps this is why President Mikhail Gorbachev may have chosen the Babi Yar commemoration to denounce, to condemn in the strongest terms past and present anti-Semitism and other forms of ethnic and religious hatred. Chairman Kravtchuk of the Ukraine similarly used this occasion to make us learn from history.

We see it in Yugoslavia today, a country literally torn apart by ethnic strife and religious antagonism that has turned that beautiful land into a battleground. We see it in the Czech and Slovak Federation. We see it in the Soviet Union, where one nationality denounces another, and does not hesitate to turn words of hatred into deeds of war, where there are deep divisions that threaten to split the country in two.

And so we in the Appeal of Conscience Foundation face a new challenge, no less difficult than the one we assumed at the moment of our founding twenty-six years ago. In those days the task was to win freedom of religion for those who yearned for it but who were denied it by the state. Happily, that struggle has been won in many places. Today our mission is to transmit a simple yet profound idea: Tolerance, respect for differences and acceptances of those of different backgrounds. The new freedom that millions of men and women are beginning

to enjoy can be a blessing for all. Let it not become a curse for the few and the weak, the minorities and those who are different. Rather, let us join hands toward the day when every man will sit under his vine and fig tree, and none will make him afraid.