



The Center for the Study of
Contemporary European Jewry
The Lester and Sally Entin
Faculty of Humanities
Tel Aviv University

For a Righteous Cause

Annual Report 2024





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The Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry at Tel Aviv University supports research on Jewish history, culture, and politics. It publishes the flagship annual Antisemitism Worldwide Report and the annual For a Righteous Cause Report. Every year, the Center organizes three seminars on Jewish affairs that are open to the public and publishes eight issues of Perspectives – analytic essays on contemporary Jewish life and thought.

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FOR A RIGHTEOUS CAUSE

The Report, published annually since 2022 by the Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry on the eve of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, documents and analyzes some of the year's most important developments and initiatives in the fight against antisemitism and racism at large across the world. It explores educational programs, legislation, and judicial and political action to express gratitude to those who joined the righteous cause, encourage others to follow their example, and present policy proposals to improve existing programs.

A six-month team effort by nine experts based with the Center and beyond it, the Report relies on field observations, interviews, and diverse publications and data. It gives particular attention to initiatives in countries often overlooked by the media.



Photo by Uriya Shavit

Abrahamic Family House, Abu Dhabi,
United Arab Emirates, April 2023

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INTRODUCTION

On October 7, 2023, thousands of Hamas terrorists killed more than 1,200 Israeli civilians, soldiers and workers based in Israel from different countries. They kidnapped almost 250 people, including babies, women and senior citizens, and took them to Gaza. The Islamist terrorists were driven by an ideology that openly expresses the genocidal intention to see the total annihilation of the State of the Jews.

Antisemitism is not the foundation of that ideology. Yet, it has become an inseparable part of it and a poison that motivates it.

The Hamas terrorists were committed to a charter that invokes the fabricated Protocols of the Elders of Zion as a historical reference and blames the Jews for all that is wrong in the West. The terrorists studied in schools that dehumanize Jews. When engaging in their sadistic, cold-blooded massacre, it was the killing of Jews, rather than of Israelis or Zionists, that they celebrated. Given the opportunity, they would not have spared one Jewish life across the country. Their attack reenacted the horrors of the Holocaust to a nation that swore “Never Again.”

Following October 7, masques were removed. For years, it was debated whether the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movements (BDS) and other anti-Israeli movements across the world aim to pressure Israel to make territorial concessions or seek its total destruction as the national home of the Jewish people. For years, it was debated whether they crusade in the name of human rights or in the name of anti-liberal forces. For years, it was debated whether they are freedom advocates or bad-old Jew-haters.

Those across the world who, in the immediate aftermath of October 7, blamed Israel for the murdering, raping and torturing of its civilians, remained indifferent to the atrocities, denied their occurrence, marched chanting “Palestine will be free from the river to the sea,” and sophisticatedly tried to force an Israeli defeat in a war it did not start provided a clear and ultimate answer as to where they really stand and what really drives them.

Criticizing Israel, even harshly, is legitimate, just as it is in the case of any other country. Denying the right of Israel to exist is illegitimate, just as it is in the case of any other country. This, and this only, is the principle that should guide politicians, law enforcers and civil rights activists from now on.

The recurring phenomenon of escalations in the Middle East leading to massive waves of antisemitic attacks in the West should not be regarded and tolerated as a manifestation of nature. There is a name for targeting people based on their ethnicity or religion. It’s called racism. There is a name for targeting Jews merely because they are Jews. It’s called antisemitism. There are sanctions and penalties prescribed for those who do so. There are governments and law enforcement agencies whose job is to ensure these are applied. It is time they do just that far more rigorously.

It was not surprising to see the fascist Russian regime supporting Hamas and giving voice to alarming antisemitic views. Birds of a feather flock together, and so do the despotic enemies of the West. Hamas does not fight Israel only. It fights against women's rights and LGBTQ+ rights. It fights religious freedom and scientific freedom. Its war is the war of Russian dictator Vladimir Putin.

The October 7 massacre and its aftermath demonstrate just how dangerous antisemitism is. Where it thrives, peace, security and prosperity will never be achieved. Our Annual Antisemitism Report Worldwide for 2022 included an essay on the rise of antisemitic rhetoric by the Houthis of Yemen. Some eyebrows were raised at focusing on what seemed at the time an esoteric expression of Jew-hatred.

In October 2023, the Houthis declared war against Israel, fired rockets and launched drones at its towns, and destabilized the free movement of cargo ships in the Red Sea.

October 7 found Israel ill-prepared after almost a year of struggling under an exceptionally incompetent, inexperienced, childish and divisive government. As the war in Gaza ensued, crucial governmental agencies performed poorly.

Sir Humphry himself could not have conceived the Ministry for Diaspora Affairs, created in 2009 for nothing but petty political reasons. The current government gave it an even more impressive name: The Ministry for Diaspora Affairs and Combatting Antisemitism.

The “rewarded” was a junior politician with little relevant experience in the field and who has made little difference.

The Ministry lacks vision and substance. It has promoted few initiatives. Larger, existing ministries could have equally promoted these. A link to a form for reporting antisemitic incidents is provided on its largely outdated website. This is an extremely lazy way of targeting the issue, but it makes no difference: the link is broken and does not lead to a form.

Government is a serious business. So is taxpayer money. The Foreign Ministry should handle the responsibilities for strengthening relations with Jewish communities and combatting antisemitism globally. It has the trained professionals, the contacts with Jewish communities, governments and NGOs, and the know-how. The Prime Minister's office should handle certain security-related and strategic aspects.

To make an actual difference in the fight against antisemitism, the Israeli government should set long-term objectives and plans, preferably in a non-partisan way and with advice from an independent panel of relevant experts.

These should involve a clear, non-negotiable definition of what constitutes antisemitism; setting criteria and priorities as to which antisemitic organizations and people Israel should ban, deplore and take legal and public actions against; carefully analyzing how to best contribute, logistically and morally, to initiatives that combat antisemitism across the world; and seeing how the actual needs of Jewish communities can be best served.

In last year's For a Righteous Cause Report, we cautioned that while it is good that fighting antisemitism had become a cause that united Jews, it must not become the only definer of their identity and common action. That call has become all the more urgent today. Jews should be informed by their rich heritage and make their voices heard on other existential issues as well. Today, more than ever, they should reach out to others, create broader alliances and promote common goods.

The past year brought more than bad news. Many have striven for righteous causes, and this Report is delighted to tell their stories as a means to express gratitude, inspire others, and encourage the improvement of existing plans.

The opening essay details plentiful exemplary speeches, marches of solidarity, governmental policies and other initiatives undertaken in dozens of countries in response to the October 7 attacks and the wave of antisemitism that followed (p. 13). The closing essay analyzes national action plans to combat antisemitism announced during the past year in countries like the United States and France (p. 55).

Several admirable initiatives are analyzed in depth in the Report. In Norway, a little-publicized project, Pathfinders, informs thousands of high school pupils about Judaism and aims to dispel prejudice and ignorance (p. 21). In the United States, several new initiatives have brought Jews and African Americans closer together (p. 41). In Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, joint prayer houses for Muslims, Christians and Jews signal the commitment of governments to advance religious tolerance and acquaint publics with Judaism (p. 47).

By arresting 154 soccer fans who chanted antisemitic slogans, the Amsterdam police sent an important message, even if one that ultimately was not legally exhausted (p. 37). Offenses related to sports stadiums and their surroundings are all too often treated within a collective and sports-related context – for example, fining clubs or banning fans from a number of matches.

By treating sports-related expressions of antisemitism and other forms of racism as criminal offenses and threatening offenders with a criminal record, law enforcers across the world can achieve greater deterrence. Perhaps, at long last, we could finally significantly reduce a phenomenon that poisons soccer and societies.

In a number of cities, restored synagogues opened in 2023. Plans to that effect were announced in others. The story of one such glorious synagogue in Vidin, Bulgaria, is inspiring (p. 27). It also presents a dilemma that calls for contemplation. In some cities where synagogues are revived, only a few Jews live and they are not religious.

The rebirth of synagogues thus does not guarantee the same for Jewish life. An easy solution is to turn temples into empty monuments or redefine their purpose to one that is not related to their Jewish heritage, even if done with some recognition of their past function.

A more difficult option, but one which perhaps better advances the objective of commemoration and preservation, is for such restored buildings to give an embracing presence to both the past

and the present of the local Jewish community, reflecting the diverse and evolving ways in which Jewish identity and destinies are manifested and inviting non-Jews to engage with them.

Following October 7, some are convinced that a civilizational war exists between Judaism and Islam. Yet, 1.9 billion Muslims are not the collective enemy of the Jews. Jewish and Muslim communities in the West have common interests and can serve as bridges for broader dialogues and cooperation.

Hakan Can, a Muslim of Turkish descent, serves as the deputy head of Austria's Federal Department for Fostering Austrian-Jewish Cultural Heritage and Combatting Antisemitism. The conversation with him (p. 61) offers useful guidelines as to how antisemitism and racism at large can be fought effectively. It also serves as an important reminder that Muslims, just as Jews, just as all human beings, should always be judged by their character and actions, not by their religion or ethnicity.

ACROSS THE WORLD: CALLING EVIL BY ITS NAME

The October 7 attacks exposed the darkness of a morally indefensible genocidal Islamist group. They then exposed the darkness of the antisemites who defended that group, celebrated its actions or denied their occurrence in the worst tradition of Jew-haters. Yet, the attack by Hamas also inspired strong demonstrations of friendship with the State of Israel. It spurred unequivocal commitments to the right of the Jewish people to have their nation state. It resulted in fearless condemnations of the crimes and decisive action against the antisemitic wave that swept the world in their aftermath.

All of those who joined the righteous cause deserve praise. The following is a partial list.

On October 10, US President Joe Biden gave a passionate speech that left many eyes teary across the Jewish world. He unsparingly described the horrors as acts of pure evil, recognized their being a link in a historical chain of crimes committed against the Jewish people and made clear: “We stand with Israel.” Biden also walked the walk by sending American aircraft carriers and troops to the Middle East, supplying Israel with crucial arms, and warning its Iran-backed enemies about the price they would pay for entering the war. The American President showed himself to be a true friend of the Jewish people and the State of Israel, who will forever remain indebted.

On October 9, Biden joined the leaders of France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom in issuing an exceptional joint statement expressing their “unequivocal condemnation of Hamas and its appalling acts of terrorism.” The leaders who joined him also issued separate and strong statements of condemnation.¹ Among the first international leaders to speak out against the attack were Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other Indian officials, including those from Modi’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky declared Israel’s right to defend itself “indisputable” and called on the world to unite against terrorism.² The Swiss government, usually an epitome of neutrality and caution, declared Hamas a terror organization. The leaders of Bulgaria, Romania, Canada, Australia, Argentina, and the European Commission, among others, also voiced their unequivocal condemnation of

¹ “Joint Statement on Israel,” The White House, October 9, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/10/09/joint-statement-on-israel/>.

² Hannah Ellis-Peters, “India Takes Strong Pro-Israel Stance Under Modi in a Departure from the Past,” *The Guardian*, October 31, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/31/india-pro-israel-narendra-modi-bjp-government>, and Agencies and TOI Staff, “Zelensky: Israel has ‘Indisputable’ Right to Defend Itself from Terror,” *Times of Israel*, October 7, 2023, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/zelensky-israel-has-indisputable-right-to-defend-itself-from-terror/>.

Hamas.³ The Czech Republic was at the forefront of expressing solidarity with Israel, with various government ministers and leaders continually supporting Israel’s right to defend itself and urging the EU to take a clearer stance in support of Israel and against Hamas.⁴ In a unanimous vote, the 284 members of the Romanian Parliament issued a declaration condemning Hamas and expressing total solidarity with Israel.⁵

Governments around the world also made symbolic displays of solidarity with Israel. Israeli flags were raised and projected in capitals across Europe and the Americas. Dignitaries from Europe and North America visited Israel to express their support and solidarity. Along with American President Biden, these included UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak; German Chancellor Olaf Scholz; French President Emmanuel Macron; Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni; Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer; Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala; Bulgarian Prime Minister Nikolay Denkov; Romanian Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu; European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen; Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte; as well as leaders and foreign ministers from Greece, Cyprus, and other countries.⁶

In Vienna, the Israeli flag flew over the Federal Chancellery and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while the Austrian Parliament was illuminated in Israel’s national colors.⁷ In Berlin, the Israeli flag was projected on the Brandenburg Gate; in Brussels, onto the European Commission Building; in London, above number ten Downing Street; in Brasilia, on Brazil’s National Congress

³ Cleary Waldo, Gabriel Epstein, Sydney Hilbush, and Aaron Y. Zelin, “Policy Watch 3793 – International Reactions to the Hamas Attack on Israel,” *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, October 11, 2023, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/international-reactions-hamas-attack-israel>; Klaus Iohannis (@KlausIohannis), “Romania Strongly Condemns this Morning Rocket Attacks...,” X, October, 7, 2023, https://twitter.com/klausiohannis/status/1710570418753474952?s=61&t=E1kmdRRFPt_LZn2NqH9X7A; and Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria [Bulgarian], Facebook, October 7, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=622474406766795&set=a.259159609764945>.

⁴ Itamar Eichner, “Czech Republic Stands by Israel During War with Hamas,” *Ynetnews*, October 11, 2023, <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/rj18qaqmt>, and “Czech PM Says His Country Will Back Israel’s Right to Self-Defense,” *Radio Prague International*, October 26, 2023, <https://english.radio.cz/czech-pm-says-his-country-will-back-israels-right-self-defence-8798270>.

⁵ Sebastian Rotaru, “Parliament Adopts a Declaration of Solidarity with Israel [Romanian],” *Euractiv.ro*, October 11, 2023, <https://www.euractiv.ro/politic-intern/parlamentul-a-adoptat-o-declaratie-de-solidaritate-cu-israel-63923>.

⁶ Jonathan Lis, “Visiting Israel, Leaders of Czech Republic, Austria Pledge Solidarity against Hamas,” *Haaretz*, October 25, 2023, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-10-25/ty-article/.premium/visiting-israel-leaders-of-czech-republic-austria-pledge-solidarity-against-hamas/0000018b-6763-d979-a3bb-ef77992a0000?lts=1700250298963>, and “The Dignitaries Who have Visited Israel so Far,” *The Wall Street Journal*, October 24, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/israel-hamas-war-news-gaza-palestinians/card/dignitaries-visits-to-israel-JbqAlbSX8QTXQppPewIV>.

⁷ “Israel’s Flag Hoisted on the Federal Chancellery and Foreign Ministry [German],” *Die Presse*, October 7, 2023, <https://www.diepresse.com/17723937/israels-flagge-auf-bundeskanzleramt-und-aussenministerium-gehisst>.

building; in New York City, the Empire State Building was illuminated in blue and white; in Sofia, Bulgaria, the National Assembly Building was illuminated in blue and white.⁸

Determined and quick steps were taken to enhance security and police presence to protect Jewish communities and Jewish institutions from harm in, among others, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom (UK), Austria, Argentina, Bulgaria, and Spain.⁹ The UK government announced £3 million in additional funding to protect Jewish communities in the country, bolstering the efforts of the Community Security Trust (CST) to place additional guards at schools, community buildings, and synagogues to deter attacks.¹⁰

Beyond increasing security at Jewish institutions, France's government vocally declared a zero-tolerance policy for any antisemitic acts perpetrated by those who want to use the Hamas attacks on Israel as a pretext for harassing, threatening, or attacking French Jews.¹¹ French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin called for the immediate expulsion of non-French nationals responsible for acts of antisemitism in the country.¹² Darmanin cited the "heightened anxiety among [France's] Jewish community" and detailed more than one hundred antisemitic incidents recorded in the country since Hamas' attacks on Israel at the time he made the statement. He also banned all pro-Palestinian demonstrations. The Palestinian cause is "an absolutely respectable one," but support for Hamas and antisemitism will not be tolerated, he emphasized.¹³

⁸ See, for example: Marcus M. Gilban, "Israeli Flag 'Kippah' Laser Projected on Brazilian National Congress Dome," *Jerusalem Post*, October 10, 2023, <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/article-767535>; Bulgarian National Television (BNT), "The Façade of the Parliament was Lit in the Colors of the Israeli Flag [Bulgarian]," *BNT News*, October 8, 2023, <https://bntnews.bg/news/osvetiha-fasadata-na-parlamenta-s-cvetovete-na-flaga-na-izrael-1250922news.html>; and "Brandenburg Gate in Berlin Lights Up with Israeli Flag in Solidarity," *Times of Israel*, October 7, 2023, https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/brandenburg-gate-in-berlin-lights-up-with-israeli-flag-in-solidarity/.

⁹ Shira Li Bartov et al., "European Countries Increase Synagogue Security as Jews Brace for Antisemitism after Hamas Attack," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 10, 2023, <https://www.jta.org/2023/10/10/global/european-countries-increase-synagogue-security-as-jews-brace-for-antisemitism-after-hamas-attack>; "Alberto Fernández Orders Increased Security at Jewish Institutions and Communicated with Israeli President [Spanish]," *Perfil*, October 7, 2023, <https://www.perfil.com/noticias/actualidad/alberto-fernandez-orden-reforzar-la-seguridad-en-lugares-de-la-comunidad-judia.phtml>; "Police Guard Jewish Institutions [German]," *Burgenland*, October 18, 2023, <https://burgenland.orf.at/stories/3228806/>; and Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria [Bulgarian], Facebook, October 17, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/Government.of.Bulgaria/videos/845414257050387>.

¹⁰ AFP-Agence France Press, "UK Boosts Funding for Security of Jewish Community after Antisemitism Spike," *Barron's*, October 12, 2023, <https://www.barrons.com/news/uk-boosts-funding-for-security-of-jewish-community-after-anti-semitism-spike-1123ee83>.

¹¹ Le Monde with AFP, "Israel-Hamas War: 'We Will Not Tolerate Any Antisemitic Act or Remarks in France,' Declared Elisabeth Borne before the National Assembly [French]," *Le Monde*, October 10, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2023/10/10/guerre-israel-hamas-nous-ne-tolererons-aucun-acte-aucun-propos-antisemite-en-france-a-declare-elisabeth-borne-devant-l-assemblee-nationale_6193578_823448.html.

¹² Le Monde with AFP, "Gérald Darmanin Calls for the 'Immediate Expulsion' of Foreign Perpetrators of Antisemitic Acts [French]," *Le Monde*, October 11, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2023/10/11/gerald-darmanin-demande-l-expulsion-immEDIATE-des-auteurs-etrangers-d-actes-antisemites_6193815_823448.html.

¹³ Noémie Lair, "France Bans All Pro-Palestinian Demonstrations and Will Arrest Any 'Troublemaker' [French]," *Radio France*, October 12, 2023, <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/la-france-interdit-toute-manifestation-pro-palestienne-et-interpellera-tout-facteur-de-troubles-1641785>.

Germany also enacted similar measures, banning pro-Palestinian rallies and banning the anti-Israeli group Samidoun from operating after it handed out sweets in Berlin to celebrate the attack.¹⁴ Authorities also targeted the Islamic Center of Hamburg (IZH) on suspicion of supporting Hizballah, raiding and searching 54 locations connected to the IZH across seven federal states.¹⁵ Other national and local governments in Europe have cracked down on pro-Palestinian protests over concerns that certain slogans and symbols, such as “from the river to the sea” that calls for the annihilation of Israel, constitute a threat for violence or an expression of antisemitism.¹⁶

In response to anti-Israeli and pro-terror marches, a number of demonstrations have been held in major cities throughout the world expressing solidarity with Israel and the Jewish community and demanding the release of all hostages held by Hamas. From New York City to Los Angeles, Prague to Paris, Buenos Aires to Mexico City and Seoul to Tokyo, Jews and non-Jews came together to vocally condemn Hamas’ barbarism and declare that the ideology Hamas stands for poses a threat to liberal societies and peace.¹⁷ In Washington DC, the biggest Jewish rally in the history of the capital demonstrated the resolve of Jews across the Union to stand against the enemies of Israel and against antisemitism.

In Seoul, South Korea, and Tokyo, Japan, demonstrators gathered to express support for Israel and denounce Hamas’ terrorism.¹⁸ In Prague’s Old Town Square, Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala declared his country would be Israel’s voice in Europe. The government’s Minister for Human Rights called to honor the victims of October 7 and demanded the release of Israeli hostages.¹⁹ After Hamas called for a “day of rage,” more than 300 demonstrators gathered outside Berlin’s Fraenkelufer Synagogue to symbolically protect it and Jewish worshippers.²⁰

Vigils have been held to commemorate Israeli victims in London, Prague, Berlin, and Vienna, among other cities throughout Europe, as demonstrators strove to keep the memory of the tragedy that occurred on October 7 at the forefront of people’s minds and take a stand against

¹⁴ “Germany Bans Pro-Palestinian Group Samidoun,” *Reuters*, October 12, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/germany-bans-pro-palestinian-group-samidoun-2023-10-12/>.

¹⁵ “German Police Raid Suspected Pro-Hezbollah Islamist Groups,” *DW*, November 16, 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/german-police-raid-suspected-pro-hezbollah-islamist-groups/a-67413510>.

¹⁶ Kate Brady et al., “European Bans on Pro-Palestinian Protests Prompt Claims of Bias,” *The Washington Post*, October 27, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/10/26/palestine-protest-ban-france-germany/>.

¹⁷ See, for example: Jewish Daily News Central, “Demonstrations Against Hamas Terrorism in Mexico City [Spanish],” *Diario Judio*, October 30, 2023, <https://diariojudio.com/noticias/manifestacion-en-contra-del-terrorismo-de-hamas-en-la-ciudad-de-mexico/456814/>.

¹⁸ Lee Jung-Youn, “Israel Supporters Hold Rally in Seoul,” *The Korea Herald*, October 17, 2023, <https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20231017000584>, and Israel in Japan (@IsraelinJapan), “On Wednesday, October 11th, a Rally was Held in Front of Shibuya Station... [Japanese],” X, October 11, 2023, <https://twitter.com/IsraelinJapan/status/1712065801648497131/history>.

¹⁹ “The Czech Republic will be the Voice of Israel in Europe, Fiala Said at an Event in Support of Israelis [Czech],” *Ceske Noviny*, November 1, 2023, <https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/2434945>.

²⁰ Toby Axelrod, “Hundreds of Germans Form ‘Human Shield’ to Protect Synagogue,” *Jerusalem Post*, October 16, 2023, <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-768540>.

antisemitism.²¹ In Baku, Azerbaijanis laid wreaths and flowers on the gates of the Israeli embassy in the city to express their sympathies with the victims.

A focal point of activism of Jewish and non-Jewish organizations and individuals around the world has been to draw attention to the plight of the Israeli hostages in Gaza. The families of hostages and their supporters launched an organized campaign for their release, adopting a variety of tactics. Among these was an organized “Kidnapped” campaign with posters featuring the photos and stories of each victim. These posters were plastered on walls in cities throughout the world and placed in empty strollers and chairs. In cities across the globe, including Rome, London, Copenhagen, Sydney and New York City, empty Shabbat tables were set up for those held captive. Each poster or symbol highlighted their plight and echoed the past when supporters of freeing Soviet Jews left an empty seat open for prisoners.²² At the iconic Obelisco de Buenos Aires near the city’s Colón Theatre, the faces of Argentinian citizens kidnapped by Hamas were projected on a big screen and their posters adorned the fence around it.²³

Media organizations and sports clubs also took a clear moral stand in condemning Hamas’ atrocities. Following the attacks, prominent national newspapers such as Australia’s *The Australian*, Germany’s *Die Welt* and the UK’s *The Sun* and *Daily Telegraph* dedicated their front-pages in whole or in part to publishing the names and pictures of Israeli victims from the attack. The covers drew valuable attention to the atrocities committed by Hamas.²⁴ The German mass-circulation *Bild* began screening images of Israeli hostages on its building in response to Hamas supporters tearing down such posters around Berlin. It also published a 50-point manifesto taking a stand against rising antisemitism and expressions of support for Hamas in the country. *Bild* declared the acts of hate to be against the country’s values and that

²¹ Daniel Ben-David, “Thousands Turn Out for Israel Vigil in London to Demand Return of Hostages,” *The Jewish Chronicle*, October 16, 2023, <https://www.thejc.com/news/news/thousands-turn-out-for-israel-vigil-in-london-to-demand-return-of-hostages-3mGccTvuYdYsMRXfBWQs0b>; “Daily Vigil Against Antisemitism [German],” *Wien*, October 19, 2023, <https://wien.orf.at/stories/3229011/>; Sylvie Corbet and Jill Lawless, “European Cities See Vigils to Oppose Antisemitism and Rallies Seeking Relief for Gaza,” *AP News*, October 22, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-global-protests-7c23ec677d36df580d9a79144c56db95>.

²² Philissa Cramer, “In Tel Aviv and Beyond, 200-Seat Empty Shabbat Tables are Set for Israeli Hostages,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 20, 2023, <https://www.jta.org/2023/10/20/israel/in-tel-aviv-and-beyond-200-seat-empty-shabbat-tables-are-set-for-israeli-hostages>; Philissa Cramer, “Empty Strollers in London Call Attention to Child Hostages in Gaza as Families Head to the UN,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 23, 2023, <https://www.jta.org/2023/10/23/global/empty-strollers-in-london-call-attention-to-child-hostages-in-gaza-as-families-head-to-the-un>; and Luke Tress, “Empty Shabbat Table Set Up in Times Square, as Fight for Hostages Extends Abroad,” *Times of Israel*, October 27, 2023, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/empty-shabbat-table-set-up-in-times-square-as-fight-for-hostages-extends-abroad/>.

²³ See: George Deek (@GeorgeDeek), “Thank You to the Azerbaijani People for this Heartfelt Gesture,” X, October 8, 2023, <https://twitter.com/GeorgeDeek/status/1711090643773137400>, and Periódico Comunidades Plus (@ComunidadesPlus), “At the #Obelisco of Buenos Aires... [Spanish],” X, November 7, 2023, <https://twitter.com/ComunidadesPlus/status/1721890396924776814>.

²⁴ *The Australian*, October 10, 2023; *Die Welt*, October 15, 2023; *The Sun*, November 2, 2023; and *Daily Telegraph*, October 13, 2023.

the time has come to take a stand against antisemitism. Now, it stated, is when democracy and German values are defended.²⁵

Every major American sports league, including Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Football League (NFL), the National Basketball Association (NBA), the National Hockey League (NHL), Major League Soccer (MLS), and Professional Golf Association (PGA), issued statements condemning Hamas' terror attacks and expressing sympathy with Israeli victims.²⁶

Germany's Mainz 05 and France's Nice soccer clubs suspended players for authoring social media posts with the slogan "from the river to the sea" and antisemitic content. At the same time, French footballer Karim Benzema faced backlash for his posts about Gaza, with the French Interior Minister going as far as suggesting he was connected to the Muslim Brotherhood and a French senator calling for him to be stripped of his citizenship.²⁷ In contrast to the embarrassing silence of the oil-funded Premier League teams, public-controlled German soccer clubs showed the face of true friendship. Werder Bremen screened photos of Israelis kidnapped and hung a big poster calling for their return in its stadium. At the same time, Borussia Dortmund invited a delegation of families from the Gaza border to a match.

Much attention and opprobrium have justifiably been given to the dramatic rise in antisemitism on university campuses across the United States. University leaders and students at so-called elite universities, from Harvard to Columbia, Cornell to Penn, NYU to George Washington University, have failed to issue unequivocal statements against calls for the annihilation of Israel. They have failed to protect Jewish students from acts of intimidation and racist hate.²⁸ But, these shameful silences were not reflective of American academia at large. Under the stewardship of the presidents of Yeshiva University, Arizona State, Arizona, Baylor, Notre Dame, and Miami, among others, a broad coalition of more than 100 public and private institutions declared that such times require moral clarity and that Hamas' brutal actions were "of hate and terrorism," not "political disagreement."²⁹

²⁵ "Bild-Manifesto: Germany, We Have a Problem!," *Bild*, October 10, 2023, <https://www.bild.de/politik/inland/politik-inland/bild-manifesto-germany-we-have-a-problem-85895486.bild.html>, and Ran Boker, "Poster of Hostages Screened on German Paper's Building," *Ynetnews*, November 15, 2023, <https://www.ynetnews.com/culture/article/hyossc11ep>.

²⁶ Ryan Saavedra, "All Major US Professional Leagues Release Statements Supporting Israel after Terror Attacks," *The Daily Wire*, October 9, 2023, <https://www.dailywire.com/news/pro-sports-leagues-release-statements-supporting-israel-after-terror-attacks>.

²⁷ Yusra Asif, "Muslim Footballers Face Suspension, Criticism for Supporting Palestinians Online," *Al Arabiya English*, October 19, 2023, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2023/10/19/Muslim-footballers-face-suspension-criticism-for-supporting-Palestinians-online>, and Matt Ford, "How German Football is Responding to Israel-Hamas Conflict," *DW*, October 23, 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/how-german-football-is-responding-to-israel-hamas-conflict/a-67182890>.

²⁸ Marc Zvi Brettler and Michael B. Poliakoff, "Why was it So Hard for Elite Universities to Condemn Hamas Terrorism?," *The Highland County Press*, October 21, 2023, <https://highlandcountypress.com/why-was-it-so-hard-elite-universities-condemn-hamas-terrorism#gsc.tab=0>.

²⁹ "100+ Colleges and Universities Across the Nation Form Coalition Standing with Israel Against Hamas," *YU News*, October 26, 2023, <https://blogs.yu.edu/news/over-100-u-s-colleges-and-universities-join-rabbi-ari-bermans-initiative-to-issue-statement-in-solidarity-with-israel/>.

Also adding their moral voice to public discourse were a number of prominent individuals from the entertainment industry, each and every one eschewing criticism and potentially losing fans to take a clear stand against Hamas and to demand the release of Israeli hostages. More than 700 Hollywood actors and executives signed an open letter organized by the non-profit Creative Community for Peace (CCFPeace) condemning Hamas' terrorism. High-profile names included Jerry Seinfeld, Amy Schumer, Michael Douglas, Mark Hamill, and Jamie Lee Curtis.³⁰ In December, Seinfeld, the greatest television comedian of all time, made a high-profile visit to Israel with his family. So, too, did a number of other television and movie stars.³¹

While the vileness of so-called social justice advocates reveals that something rotten and deeply misguided has taken hold in parts of liberal societies, the clarity and firmness with which others have taken a stand reveal all has not been lost. A light shines in the darkness, and the light will not be overcome.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Simple question, simple answer.** The chasm between governments, organizations and individuals who unequivocally condemned Hamas and antisemitism and those who celebrated or ignored the October 7 atrocities comes down to one crucial question: Do they accept the right of the State of Israel to exist as the national home of the Jewish people, within any kind of borders, or not? With all due respect to nuance, this is the question that needs to be raised again and again in every debate, action plan or legislation.
2. **Work to Expand Coalitions.** Continued and concerted efforts should be made to build alliances with other faith communities, organizations, governments, and individuals who share a common cause. Broad-based coalitions based on shared values and objectives will enable sustained actions, campaigns and change.
3. **Don't Wait for Bad News.** Combatting antisemitism should be ongoing and decisive rather than retroactive. For example, it should not have taken the events that occurred in the aftermath of October 7 to prompt action on college campuses in the United States against the intimidation of Jewish students. The US Department of Education, in particular, must take a zero-tolerance approach to root out the problem.

– **Dr. Carl Yonker**, with contributions from Maia Bornshtein, Paul Frankel, Rafael Nabizade, Shiven Nath, and Stilian Steffanov

³⁰ CCFPeace, "Israel Under Attack – Open Letter," CCFPeace, October 12, 2023, <https://www.creativecommunityforpeace.com/blog/2023/10/12/israel-under-attack-open-letter/>; Elizabeth Wagmeister, "Gal Gadot, Chris Pine, and 700 Hollywood Figures Condemn Hamas, Demand Return of Hostages: 'This is Terrorism. This is Evil,'" *Variety*, October 12, 2023, <https://variety.com/2023/tv/news/hollywood-open-letter-israel-support-hamas-war-1235753904/>; and Judy Kurtz, "Hollywood Stars Release Letter Condemning Hamas Amid Israeli Conflict," *The Hill*, October 12, 2023, <https://thehill.com/blogs/in-the-know/4253130-hollywood-stars-condemning-hamas-israeli-conflict/>.

³¹ Walla!, "Jerry Seinfeld Lands in Israel in Show of Solidarity," *Jerusalem Post*, December 19, 2023, <https://www.jpost.com/j-spot/article-778514>.

NORWAY: KNOW THY NEIGHBOR

The Jewish Pathfinders project is a remarkable intervention by the Jewish Community of Oslo, designed to familiarize young Norwegians with Jews and thereby reduce the potential for antisemitism in tomorrow's society. The project is worthy of attention because of its apparent success and its potential role as a model for similar interventions in other countries and contexts.

Norway's Jewish community numbers just 1,500 people (0.03% of the population), about half of whom are registered members of the two Jewish communities, one in Oslo and one in Trondheim. Few Norwegians have met a Jew, and even fewer know any Jews personally. The Pathfinders project came about as a publicly funded Jewish initiative to show young people what it is like to be a young Jew in Norway, using the power of personal encounters to spread knowledge about Jews and Judaism and thereby prevent antisemitic prejudice.

Norway is a low scorer in international surveys measuring antisemitic attitudes. Nevertheless, recent decades have witnessed an increased sense of threat among Jews, especially during periods of escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Early signs of a changing climate came in 2002, with reports emerging of Norwegian Jews receiving death threats and accusations such as "child-murderers." A Jewish spokesperson told reporters at the time that Jews in Norway "stick to themselves, they dare not wear a kippa on their head, they see that their children are bullied at school and kept out of friendship groups."¹

In 2006, an Islamist armed with an automatic rifle fired several rounds at the synagogue in Oslo. In 2009, during the Gaza War, an anti-Israel protest turned into scenes of antisemitic violence.² In 2011, an investigation found that 60% of pupils in Oslo schools said they sometimes used "Jew" as an insult and that a third of Jewish pupils experienced antisemitic incidents on a weekly basis.³ Following the October 7, massacre of Israeli citizens by Hamas, the Jewish Community of Oslo issued a rare statement warning of a rise in threatening incidents targeting Jews and Jewish families."⁴

The specter of antisemitism encouraged the establishment of the Jewish Pathfinders project in 2015. Its purpose was, and remains, to familiarize young people with Jews and Judaism through personal meetings and classroom dialogue. The Norwegian government supported the project from the start. In 2016, the government launched its first four-year "Action Plan against Antisemitism," a multi-pronged program later renewed for 2021-2024. The project continues to receive public funding through the Action Plan under the new center-left government.

¹ Kjell T. Barøy, "Norske jøder har fått drapstrusler," *NTB*, April 1, 2002, <https://www.aftenbladet.no/utenriks/i/z6yXw/norske-joeder-har-faatt-drapstrusler>.

² Eirik Eigladd, *The Anti-Jewish Riots in Oslo* (Porsgrunn, Norway: Communalism Press, 2010).

³ Anette Holth Hansen, "Ett av tre jødiske barn hetset på skolen," *NRK.no*, June 7, 2011, <https://www.nrk.no/osloogviken/en-av-tre-hetses-pa-skolen-1.7664103>.

⁴ Det Mosaiske Trossamfund, "Bekymringsmelding – et varsko for det norske demokratiet," ND, <https://www.dmt.oslo.no/bekymringsmelding/>.

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Now in its ninth consecutive year, the project each year sends two young Norwegian Jews out on a nationwide tour to visit school classes, mainly at the upper secondary level. In the course of 2022, a total of 224 classes were visited.⁵

The visits take place upon invitation from the schools and typically take the shape of a 90-minute session in which the Pathfinders talk about what it is like to be a young Jew in Norway. The presentations are designed to bring about a dialogue in the classroom, in which students are encouraged to discuss and reflect on universal topics such as belonging, prejudice, identity, and diversity.

The Pathfinders themselves are recruited from the small cohorts of Jewish youths. Becoming a Pathfinder is no small matter and significant resources are devoted to their training. Candidates must complete a one-year educational program designed to provide a foundation of knowledge and a set of skills necessary to fill the Pathfinder role.

The educational program, called Shvilim (Paths), is organized by the Jewish community in partnership with academic institutions and NGOs in Norway, Israel, and the United States. For the 2023-2024 program, contributing institutions include the Theological Faculty at the University of Oslo, the Upper Galilee Leadership Institute, and the Anti-Defamation League. The program gives prospective Pathfinders an opportunity to gain knowledge about Jewish history, religion, and culture. It educates on how to lead and conduct democratic dialogue. They are also encouraged to explore their own Jewish identity. As such, the program has a broader purpose to “educate knowledgeable Jewish youths motivated to vitalize Jewish life in Norway, both internally and as part of the open, multicultural society.”⁶

One of the initial Pathfinders, who has been closely associated with the project subsequently and, as other interviewees, asked not to be named for reasons of privacy, described the typical in-class presentation. He called it “very dynamic,” with the content of the talks and discussions changing with each visit based on the questions arising from the class and the experiences accumulated by the Pathfinders.

Some things remain at the heart of the presentations: normalizing and “taking back” the word “Jew,” putting an ordinary face on the concept of a Jew in the minds of young Norwegians, and explaining some basic ideas students typically wonder about, such as circumcision, the idea of being a “Chosen People,” the challenge of antisemitism, and Jewish life in Norway in general.⁷

“I didn’t know that it [antisemitism] was so widespread, but now I am aware, and I wish to contribute to preventing such hatred.”

– A student’s reaction to a Jewish Pathfinder visit⁸

⁵ Det Mosaiske Trossamfund, “Informasjonstiltak mot antisemittisme: Sluttrapport 2022,” p. 14.

⁶ Det Mosaiske Trossamfund, “Informasjonstiltak mot antisemittisme: Sluttrapport 2020,” p. 27.

⁷ Interview with the author, October 31, 2023.

⁸ Det Mosaiske Trossamfund, “Informasjonstiltak mot antisemittisme: Sluttrapport 2021,” p. 13.

“We put a face on Norwegian Jews. A lot of people have never met a Jew before, and sometimes they can exclaim: ‘What, you are Jewish? But you don’t look Jewish, and you are completely ordinary!’”

– Nadine, a 2022 Pathfinder⁹

“A girl in this class had displayed quite strong antisemitic attitudes on social media. And it was, in fact, pretty nasty what she had written [...] When someone behaves like that, you assume that this person is acting out of some lack of awareness, or opinions picked up at home, or some image you have constructed in your head. And then, when we finished speaking, I had a chat with her, and she had [later] written to us and said she cried, asked for forgiveness and was completely in despair; she didn’t know how she could sort of make up for all she had said on social media. At that time, we had apparently made such an impression that she regretted everything she had said and was completely distraught.”

– A Jewish Pathfinder’s testimony¹⁰

“I have learned about what it’s like to be a Jew in Norway and a lot about the religion itself. I got to learn how you view yourself and others. We are all more alike than we think.”

– A student’s reaction to a Jewish Pathfinder visit¹¹

“I didn’t learn much about Judaism in school and so it was easy to generalize or fail to see the diversity among Jews. It was just fantastic to be able to ask about anything on our minds and I got a much more nuanced view of Judaism. It doesn’t feel as distant as it did previously.”

– A student’s reaction to a Jewish Pathfinder visit¹²

When the Pathfinders enter a classroom, a commonly heard first response is something like this: “Where are these Jews they said would come? I haven’t seen any.”

It follows that the most obvious impact of the Pathfinders project is that tens of thousands of young Norwegians have encountered a pair of real-life Jewish peers, something they would otherwise likely not experience. They have had the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the Pathfinders about not just the joys, sorrows and diversity of Jewishness, but also larger questions of belief, identity and prejudice in their own lives.

⁹ Frida Wattne Lindland, “Jeg er norsk og jødisk, og det går veldig fint an å være begge deler på en gang!,” *NRK P3*, November 1, 2022, <https://p3.no/jeg-er-norsk-og-jodisk-og-det-gar-veldig-fint-an-a-vaere-begge-deler-pa-en-gang/>.

¹⁰ Nina Gacic, “‘Jøss, er du jøden?’: En kvalitativ studie av interaksjonen med jødiske veivisere, stereotypiske forestillinger om jøder og norsk skolehverdag,” MA Thesis, Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society (2019), pp. 59-60.

¹¹ Det Mosaiske Trossamfund, “Informasjonstiltak mot antisemittisme: Sluttrapport 2020,” p. 12.

¹² Det Mosaiske Trossamfund, “Informasjonstiltak mot antisemittisme: Sluttrapport 2021,” p. 13.

The feedback from students and teachers is reported to be very positive. Judging from excerpts produced in the annual reports by the Jewish Community of Oslo, students tend to find the meetings engaging, thought-provoking, and enlightening, especially regarding the diversity of Judaism and the issue of how antisemitism affects young Jews.

The Pathfinders themselves also indicate that the encounters are positive and have a real impact on reducing prejudice. As one of them stressed, the vast majority of classroom interactions are experienced as positive and rewarding. Each in-class visit tends to be followed by half an hour of informal conversation outside the classroom, where some students approach the Pathfinders to continue discussions. The Pathfinders find these exchanges to be particularly fruitful.

One of the 2021 Pathfinders, Talia, found that the students would respond with all sorts of questions about religious ideas and practices, life as a Jewish youth and whether Jews can drink alcohol. She was once asked whether Jews could wear bikinis.¹³

There have also been negative incidents, and some serious ones, but they are few and far between and are typically handled responsibly by the school in question.¹⁴

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the single most difficult issue the Pathfinders face in their classroom interactions. It is, as one of the Pathfinders told me, “the question they dread the most.”¹⁵ One way they handle the issue is by always coming in pairs so that the Pathfinders can support each other in case of tension.

One of the Pathfinders explained how she decided to “take ownership of the whole issue” at the very outset by telling the class about her personal experiences of being confronted and held responsible, as a Norwegian Jew, for real or imagined actions taken by the State of Israel. She would purposefully “employ a lot of pathos” to hammer home this point, to have students understand the troubling and hurtful consequences of such experiences. At the same time, the Pathfinders note in their presentations that all Jews have some relationship with Israel – through family, religion, culture, or some combination, but that it is up to each individual Jew to define the nature of this relationship.¹⁶

While these approaches often prove effective, some Pathfinders have nevertheless decided not to disclose their personal relationship to Israel, e.g., having grown up there, simply because they feared the potential repercussions.¹⁷ And some of them chose not to discuss the topic in class at all, as they did not want to enter into a political discussion.¹⁸

It is no secret that antisemitic attitudes exist in some Muslim communities in Europe. Jakob, one of the 2022 Pathfinders, emphasized the importance of building bridges not only from

¹³ Birgitte Vågnes Bakken, “Dana (21) har blitt møtt med nazi-helsing og ‘jævla jøde,’” *Framtida*, May 25, 2022, <https://framtida.no/2022/05/25/unge-jodar-i-noreg>.

¹⁴ Interview with the author, October 31, 2023.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Bakken, “Dana (21) har blitt møtt med nazi-helsing og ‘jævla jøde.’”

minority to majority, but also between different minorities. In particular, he noted that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict often impacts Jewish-Muslim relations in Norway:

“A lot of people, also non-Muslims, have trouble distinguishing ‘Jew’ from ‘Israeli.’ When a part of the population is prejudiced towards Jews, the significance of dialogue is even greater, and we work particularly hard to enable a dialogue with Norwegian Muslims.”¹⁹

Jakob said that his most fruitful Pathfinder visits were in the parts of Oslo where there is a large share of immigrants from Muslim-majority countries:

“Here I feel that I have established the best rapport and had the best experiences. Often the students have had this impression that Jews and Israelis are bad people, and when they encounter a Norwegian Jew who instead chooses to focus on the similarities we have, bridges can really be built.”²⁰

This sentiment was echoed by Yuval, another Pathfinder who served in 2021: “We say that we are different, and the Muslims recognize themselves in this. Then we get a good dialogue, and we can learn something from them, too.”²¹

Another former Pathfinder I spoke to noted that conversations with first-generation immigrants, including Palestinian youths, were “very good.” Moreover, as Jews who believe in God, the Pathfinders would often feel they had more in common with faithful Muslim youths than with the majority of Norwegians because they shared a belief in God. This became an important common ground upon which understanding could be built.²²

In 2023, a report evaluating the government’s Action Plan against Antisemitism was published. The report found that the Pathfinders project was seen by most in the Jewish community as a high-quality and high-value measure. Though no survey figure is available, this assessment is based on an interviews-based study in which Jewish respondents all spoke positively of the program.

Respondents praised the program for providing a “perspective from within,” emphasizing that the fight against antisemitism should not be reduced to history and Holocaust education, but should also include familiarizing people with Jewish life and culture in Norway today.²³ As one of the 2022 Pathfinders put it, “half the job is already done when we enter the classroom,” because most students’ knowledge about Jews and Judaism is related to “contexts that take the extreme as a point of departure.”²⁴

¹⁹ Claudio Castello, “Jødisk veiviser vil motvirke fordommer,” *Utop*, February 16, 2022, <https://www.utrop.no/nyheter/ansikt-i-fokus/294513/>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ “Får spørsmål om hvorfor de dreper barn i Gaza,” *Dagen*, August 1, 2021, <https://www.dagen.no/nyheter/far-sporsmal-om-hvorfor-de-dreper-barn-i-gaza/>.

²² Interview with the author, October 31, 2023.

²³ PROBA Samfunnsanalyse, *Evaluering av handlingsplaner mot antisemittisme, 2016-2023* (Oslo, 2023).

²⁴ Det Mosaiske Trossamfund, “Informasjonstiltak mot antisemittisme: Sluttrapport 2022,” p. 8.

The Pathfinders, in other words, broaden young people’s view of Jews, showing them that a Jew is more than a Holocaust victim or an “exotic” religious person. The Pathfinders show that Jews are a diverse mosaic of living, breathing, ordinary people with a shared history and ethnic-religious background.

Nevertheless, the Pathfinders do speak about the Holocaust in Norway. The topic is usually introduced by talking about the anti-Jewish paragraph in the Norwegian Constitution, which banned Jews from entering the country from 1814 until 1851. This becomes a gateway to the topic of the deep roots of antisemitism as well as the Holocaust in Norway. From this, they also try to convey an understanding of the Zionist movement and the birth of Israel. The current climate, in which hostility toward Jews and the State of Israel has intensified amid the Gaza conflict, has made things difficult for the Pathfinders who visit schools. They have encountered negative remarks from some students about “playing the ‘Holocaust Card.’”

Policy Recommendations

1. **Sustain Funding and Institutional Support.** Norwegian authorities should continue to provide consistent financial support and institutional backing to the Jewish Pathfinders project, recognizing its value as a long-term investment in fostering intercultural understanding and countering antisemitism. They should ensure that the program remains accessible to schools and educational institutions across Norway to maintain its positive impact on future generations.
2. **Invest in Robust Research.** Funding should be allocated for a comprehensive and systematic study to assess the long-term impact of the Jewish Pathfinders project on reducing antisemitic prejudice among young people in Norway. High-quality research is essential to measure the program’s effectiveness and provide empirical evidence of its effects on attitudes.
3. **Explore Possibilities for Exporting the Model.** Relevant stakeholders should explore sharing this innovative model with other countries. The argument for exporting the model could potentially be strengthened through a systematic research study.

– *Dr. Johannes Due Enstad*

BULGARIA: A SYNAGOGUE REBORN

In recent months, a number of restored synagogues were inaugurated across Europe, and plans for the restoration of others were announced. Seventy-eight years after the Nazis deported the Jews of the island of Kos (**Greece**) to Auschwitz, the island's Kal Shalom Synagogue is functioning once again as a place of worship. The renovation project was completed in partnership with the Municipality of Kos, the Central Jewish Council of Greece (KISE), the Jewish Community of Rhodes and the Civic Society of Hippocrates. The project aims to preserve the memory and culture of the Jewish community and enhance its role in the island's current life.¹

In **Belgium**, Antwerp's Great Synagogue (Machsike Hadass, Osten Shul), serving the city's Orthodox community, was reopened in May 2023 at an inauguration ceremony attended by the Belgian Prime Minister and Mayor of Antwerp. Constructed in the early 1900s, the full-scale renovations of the synagogue began in 2019, three years after the Flemish government awarded a four million Euro grant to restore both it and the Shomre HaDas (Dutch) Synagogue in the city.²

In **Lithuania**, for the first time since the Second World War, a religious ceremony was held at the wooden synagogue in Žiežmariai. The Žiežmariai Synagogue fell into disrepair following the war. It was reopened following a five-year renovation project in 2021 by the Lithuanian Jewish Community, local governments and other Lithuanian government bodies. While it can serve as a synagogue, it will also be used as a venue for cultural events and exhibitions.³

In **Germany**, more than eight decades after the Bornplatz Synagogue in Hamburg was destroyed on Kristallnacht, city officials transferred ownership of the site where it once stood to the city's Jewish community.⁴ The initiative to reconstruct the synagogue has been active since 2020. Funding for the reconstruction project will be provided by the Hamburg municipal government, the German government and private donations. Its eventual reconstruction will restore a vital piece of Jewish life to the city and its history.

In **Romania**, after a nine-year effort, the Romanian Jewish community announced plans to restore the Ashkenazic Great Synagogue in Constanța, a port city on the Black Sea.⁵

¹ KISE, "Opening of the Renovated Synagogue Kos," kis.gr, July 21, 2023, <https://en.kis.gr/index.php/anakoinoseis-menu/enkainia-gia-ten-epanaleitourgia-tes-synagoges-tes-ko>.

² "Antwerp's Great Synagogue Inaugurated after Renovations," *The Brussels Times*, May 8, 2023, <https://www.brusselstimes.com/493274/antwerps-great-synagogue-inaugurated-after-renovations>.

³ "First Religious Ceremony at Žiežmariai Synagogue since World War II," Jewish Community of Lithuania, June 5, 2023, <https://www.lzb.lt/en/2023/06/05/first-religious-ceremony-at-ziezmariai-synagogue-since-world-war-ii/>.

⁴ Jackie Hajdenberg, "85 Years after Kristallnacht, Germany to Begin Rebuilding Grand Synagogue in Hamburg," *Jerusalem Post*, September 29, 2023, https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/article-760953?utm_source=jpost.app.apple&utm_medium=share.

⁵ European Jewish Congress, "Romanian Jewish Community President Announces Restoration of Constanța Synagogue," EJC, June 22, 2023, <https://eurojewcong.org/news/communities-news/romania/romanian-jewish-community-president-announces-restoration-of-constanta-synagogue/>.

How do deserted, broken synagogues get restored after decades of neglect? The story of one glorious building recently revived in Bulgaria is revealing – and inspiring.

Due to its crossroad location, Bulgarian land has become a place where the legacies of different cultures are found. Here, diverse ethnicities have shared a long history of peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding for centuries. Vidin, a port city in the northwest of the country on the southern banks of the Danube River, was no exception from this rule and was home to a mix of ethnic communities well until the mid-20th century.

One of them is the Jewish community. In 1881, the community numbered around 1,300 people (approximately 10% of the city’s population at that time).⁶ The Vidin Jewry was an inseparable part of the city’s social, economic and cultural life. Highly educated and skilled, these respectable citizens of Vidin contributed in no small measure to the city’s prosperity. With some slight fluctuations, their number remained steady until 1950, when most Jews left Bulgaria and moved to Israel.

Jews in Vidin had an educational society (Prosveta, “Enlightenment”), a Jewish sports club (Zhabotinsky), a Jewish kindergarten, a Jewish school and a Jewish public kitchen. The regional archive in Vidin offers one of the richest collections on Bulgarian Jews. It preserved valuable documents on the daily lives of community members – black-and-white photographs, letters, postcards and official correspondence. The Jews of Vidin participated in political life, trade, culture, public events and charity. They participated in the wars Bulgaria fought for its unification. They were an integral part of Vidin’s social fabric.

The spiritual life of the Vidin Jewry revolved around the synagogue constructed in 1863. In the course of the Russian-Ottoman war of 1877-1878, in which Bulgaria was liberated after almost five centuries of Ottoman Muslim domination, Vidin was subjected to an artillery barrage. The synagogue burnt in flames and was almost completely destroyed.

Over its ashes, a new synagogue was built in 1894 in the free Principality of Bulgaria, serving as one of many symbols for the renewal and resurrection of Bulgaria. Funds were raised through nationwide donations. It took just one year from the point the cornerstone was laid until the temple was solemnly consecrated in the presence of high-ranking officials. At its completion, the synagogue in Vidin was the largest in Bulgaria and among the largest in the Balkans, with a capacity of 1,000 people.

In 1909, a bigger synagogue was opened in Sofia, the capital. Yet, as beautiful as that synagogue was, the Vidin Synagogue was superior in terms of the splendor and intricacy of the internal decoration. Thanks to its imposing silhouette, it was referred to as “the White Swan of the Danube,” from which it was visible. The architectural plan was harmonious, symmetrical, and highly ambitious for those times. It included a spacious central part. Four high towers. Dozens of arches and cast-iron columns. A stately façade. Rosettes with hexagonal stars and murals with floral motifs. Colored glass and elegant window grilles. Floor mosaics. Four marble slabs with inscriptions in Bulgarian and Hebrew with the names of donors and fallen soldiers of Jewish descent on the walls.

⁶ “Remembering the Vidin Jews,” “The Old Vidin,” Racho Milanov, 2021, p. 242.

No expense was spared. High-quality construction materials and luxury goods were delivered from the port of Vidin, brought there from all corners of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Wooden planks from Transylvania, paints from Bohemia, and chandeliers, lamps and furnishing from Vienna were among them.⁷

During the Second World War, Jewish religious and cultural life dwindled. Bulgaria allied with the Axis. Around 48,000 Jews living within the prewar territorial boundaries of the country were rescued from deportation to concentration camps largely due to popular resistance and the opposition of influential public figures and key institutions. Nevertheless, from the territories Bulgaria reclaimed and subjected to its administration in the course of the war, more than 11,000 Jews were deported. Moreover, Jews living in Bulgaria were subjected to a set of discriminatory measures during the war under the Law for Protection of the Nation (1941-1944).

By the late 1940s and following the emigration of the majority of the Bulgarian Jewry, the Vidin Synagogue lost its viability and gradually fell into a state of disrepair. The new communist regime had no interest in saving it. There was strong opposition to religious practices of all kinds. The synagogue was used as a warehouse, where construction materials, grain, and, at some point, the decors of a drama theater were stored. This considerably worsened the building's condition.

During the 1960s, the state invested more in archaeology, culture, renovation and conservation of monuments. As a result, in 1967, the building received the status of a cultural monument of national importance and, in the ensuing years, some partial repairs were carried out.

In the 1980s, as part of the nationwide campaign aimed at marking the 1300th anniversary of the establishment of the medieval Bulgarian state, the authorities declared their intention to restore the synagogue to its original state. Those in power turned it into a concert hall for the needs of the municipal symphonic orchestra. A huge organ was ordered, reinforced concrete columns were erected and the roof was removed with the idea of having it entirely renovated.

That did not happen. The democratic revolution of 1989 set other, more urgent priorities. The restoration plan was abandoned, leaving the temple with no roof. Another circumstance greatly complicated the situation – the building was restituted, and property rights belonged no more to the state authorities but to Shalom, the organization of the Jews in Bulgaria. Caught in this legal-bureaucratic complexity, municipal and state institutions were not able to apply for funding and launch a renovation project.

The synagogue crumbled, with overgrown vegetation extending to the point that there were trees inside of it. It became a place for homeless people, drug addicts and stray animals. Its vandalized outer appearance never failed to attract the attention of occasional visitors who expressed their dismay at the condition of the monument.

⁷ Elko Hazan, Ester Georgieva, Angelina Rashkova, and Sonya Levi, *Concise Illustrated Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities and their Synagogues in Bulgaria* (Sofia: Kamea Design, 2012).

After years of frustrated plans and empty hopes, a light at the end of the tunnel. On March 9, 2017, the General Assembly of Shalom, the property owner, decided to donate it to the Vidin Municipality.

A project was drafted and named the Restoration and Adaptation of the Vidin Synagogue into a Tourist Attraction and Cultural Center. The project sought to create a site that combines the functions of a museum, an exhibition space, a multifunctional hall for a vast array of public events and a park. The second floor was designed as a library with study spaces. One area was designated solely for the needs of the local Jewish community.

The project was approved and received funding along the lines of the Operational Program “Regions in Growth” (2014-2020) of the European Union under Priority Axes 6 “Regional Tourism.” This program aims to protect and promote cultural heritage through tourist development, including unused cultural tourism sites in Bulgaria.

This financial support is oriented to projects that conserve sites of national and world significance, but also for their popularization and development as sustainable tourist attractions. The program has a two-pronged approach: conservation of the cultural heritage, thus improving the competitiveness of Bulgarian tourism, and creating favorable conditions for local business initiatives.⁸

The revival of the synagogue cost almost 10 million Leva (roughly around 5 million Euro). Most of the funds were given in the form of financial assistance through EU programs. However, the Bulgarian government and the Vidin Municipality also contributed.

Architect Angel Nedyalkov and technical manager of the construction Genadi Ivanov led a team of engineers, designers, conservator-restorers and construction workers who cooperated closely throughout the complex process in the endeavor to bring the synagogue back to its authentic appearance. The Vidin Municipality, headed by Dr. Tsvetan Tsenkov, closely monitored the progress and provided assistance. Old photographs and the recollections of living witnesses were used to recreate the old appearance. Natural materials were used, refraining from plastic and styrofoam. Underground communications, video surveillance, heating and plumbing systems, artistic lightning, and fire protection systems were put in place. The four marble slabs mentioned above, which were kept in storage for decades, were restored and brought back to where they originally belonged.⁹ Adjacent to the temple, a brand-new tourist information center offers visitors brochures, maps, and souvenirs, and promotes tourist sights and upcoming cultural events.

⁸ “Priority Axes, Priority Axes 6: Regional Tourism,” Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, 2020, <https://www.mrrb.bg/en/infrastructure-and-programmes/op-regions-in-growth/priority-axes/>.

⁹ Sonya Valerieva, “Marble Plates Preserve the Memory of the Vidin Synagogue [Bulgarian],” Bulgarian National Radio – BNR Vidin, September 4, 2023, <https://bnr.bg/vidin/post/101872864/plochite>.

The national census of 2011 revealed that only three self-identified Jews live in the Vidin region.¹⁰ In the 2021 census, their number increased to eight.¹¹ The renovated synagogue was thus not intended to serve primarily for religious rites. Upon donating the property rights, Shalom suggested that it should have a new main function as a cultural hall and honor the legacy of Jules Pascin.

Pascin, an artist of Jewish descent, was born in Vidin in 1885 as Julius Mordechai Pinkas. Already at a young age, he gained international acclaim and toured prestigious art galleries with his exhibitions, in which his primary subject was women. Pascin lived in Munich, in Paris (where he came to be known as the Prince of Montparnasse) and in New York (where he naturalized). His works are preserved in some of the most expensive private collections all over the world. He committed suicide in June 1930 because of unrequited love. In 2000, he was declared an honorary citizen of Vidin.¹²

The official inauguration of the restored Synagogue took place on September 4, 2023, and received nationwide media coverage. Among the distinguished guests on this long-anticipated occasion were the President of the Republic of Bulgaria, Rumen Radev; the Minister of Culture, Krastyo Krastev; the newly appointed Ambassador of the State of Israel, Yosi Levi Sfar; the Deputy Head of the Israeli Diplomatic Mission, Naama Levy; the Chief Rabbi of Bulgaria, Yoel Yifrah; and the Mayor of Vidin, Dr. Tsvetan Tsenkov. Members of the Jewish community and Shalom, members of the Central Israelite Religious Council, members of the diplomatic corps and citizens of this city were also present.

On this solemn occasion, all guests at the event watched a special video message by Israeli President Isaac Herzog. He said:

“[...] It is a moment when we come together to honor the bonds that history has forged over millennia between generations of Jews and the beautiful land of Bulgaria. The magnificent synagogue [...] tells us the tale of the proud local Jewish community of Vidin which flourished for more than five centuries in that city, and this is indeed a great Jewish and Bulgarian story. [...] I thank you graciously for everything you have done [...] to make this beautiful synagogue vibrate once again with life and tell the fascinating story of the Bulgarian Jewry to people from all over the world. [...] And I thank the local Jewish community of Bulgaria and its leadership who continue to make us proud.”¹³

Bulgarian President Rumen Radev emphasized in his speech: “May this temple serve as a bridge through which the heirs of the Vidin Jews will be able to come back to their roots so

¹⁰ “Population by Ethnicity and Mother Tongue in Vidin Region [Bulgarian],” National Statistical Institute, 2011, <https://censusresults.nsi.bg/census/reports/2/2/r9.aspx>.

¹¹ “Ethnocultural Characteristics of the Population by September 7, 2021 [Bulgarian],” National Statistical Institute, 2021, p. 15, <https://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/pressreleases/Census2021-ethnos.pdf>.

¹² “Jules Pascin, 1885-1930 [Bulgarian],” Vidin Almanac, <https://vidin-almanac.bg/artist/%D0%B6%D1%83%D0%BB-%D0%BF%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%BD-1885-1930/>.

¹³ Embassy of Israel – Bulgaria, “Video Message of the President of the State of Israel Isaac Herzog,” Facebook, September 5, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/100064583533988/videos/pcb.685499526946159/829326758742075>.

that the bond between Bulgarians and Jews and the friendship between Bulgaria and Israel grow stronger.”¹⁴

The synagogue has already started its new life as a cultural center. It is open for visits every day. The entrance fee is ten Leva (five Euro) for regular visitors and three Leva (one and a half Euro) for students and retired people. There is no entrance fee on most public holidays and on the European Night of Museums. The site is managed by the municipal cultural institute Dunav, which administers the activities of the other municipal cultural establishments. A permanent exhibition is dedicated to Jules Pascin’s life and Vidin’s Jewish community. The center received high-quality copies of valuable Jewish books and documents as a donation from the State Archival Agency. It has already hosted its first event: a conference that brought together researchers from Bulgaria and Serbia from the domains of ethnography and archival work.¹⁵

Yoram Elron, Israel’s former ambassador to the country, visited the synagogue days before his mandate’s expiration and its grand opening as a cultural center. He expressed his astonishment at the authenticity and high professionalism of the restoration works and stated that Vidin would be a privileged place in Israel’s tourism market.¹⁶

These words were highly appreciated in Vidin in light of the concerted efforts of local authorities to overcome the city’s geographic isolation and attract tourists. Because of its rich history and marvelous monuments, the city’s tourist potential is enormous. However, that potential has remained unfulfilled due to poor infrastructure and other problems.

The synagogue is located in immediate proximity to the medieval Baba Vida Fortress, the St. Panteleimon Church and the Osman Pazvantoglu Mosque. With the completion of its long-anticipated restoration, the synagogue has already taken its rightful place in the so-called “Triangle of Tolerance,” which is suitable for religious tourism. Close by are the Epigraphic Museum, the Ethnographic Museum, a huge riverside park, an old gunpowder magazine and remnants of the city’s fortification system known as Kaleto.

There is more Jewish heritage in the city. One can visit the monument dedicated to Jules Pascin in 2000. There is also the opportunity to see the monument on the city’s square erected in 2003 by the descendants of the Vidin Jews to commemorate the Jews who were saved from the death camps. The inscription on that monument reads: “We will never forget. [...] The attitude of the citizens of Vidin towards the Jews was expressly hospitable, tolerant and humane. [...] With eternal gratitude and love to our fellow citizens from Vidin and to the entire Bulgarian people for their human feat.”

¹⁴ TVV Vidin, “Official Inauguration of Cultural Center Julius Paschen [Bulgarian],” Vidin.tv, September 5, 2023, <https://www.vidin.tv/?p=10779>.

¹⁵ Krasimir Kamenov, “International Conference Brought Together Researchers and Archivists [Bulgarian],” Bulgarian National Radio – BNR Vidin, September 28, 2023, <https://bnr.bg/vidin/post/101884070/mejdunarodna-konferencija-sabira-izsledovateli-i-arhivisti-vav-vidin>.

¹⁶ TVV Vidin “Ambassador Elron: Vidin will be a Privileged Place in the Tourism Market in Israel [Bulgarian],” Vidin.tv, August 3, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UrFyB1IkxA>.

Mayor Tsenkov hopes that Vidin will attract a segment of Israeli tourists who visit Bulgaria annually. For the first six months of 2023, Bulgaria was visited by 130,000 Israeli tourists.¹⁷ In 2022, Bulgaria welcomed a total of 174,000 visitors from Israel.¹⁸ Indeed, no other country outside of Europe generates more visits to Bulgaria than Israel, including the United States, Canada, Russia, China and Japan.

Vidin is my hometown.

I remember the first time I discovered the synagogue. I was a child who observed from a safe distance this somewhat alluring and, at the same time, eerily disintegrating structure. “That’s the synagogue,” an old passerby told me.

At the time, I did not know what a synagogue was.

The building was encircled with a rusty fence, and there were signs in bold red letters, barely visible from lush vegetation, strictly prohibiting entrance because of safety concerns.

I am pleased to see the temple in its present state. Undeniably, this building being removed from the extensive list of endangered immovable cultural heritage is good news. Reviving Vidin’s authentic urban landscape is also a step in the right direction.

This achievement was used for political purposes by Mayor Tsenkov in his campaign for a second term. He launched his campaign with an event in the synagogue turned cultural center, where his team presented the public with a report of what has been done and what they plan on doing next. He won, and by an overwhelming majority, too.

Still, I regret to say that I do not share the optimistic view that the renewed synagogue has the potential to attract many tourists. Much more must be done regarding infrastructure, popularization, and solid placement on the regional and national tourism market. I am not even talking about the international one; this is too far-fetched.

The local government hopes that the cultural center will be financially self-sufficient and live off the money it charges for the services it offers. In case of low attendance by tourists, the municipality may find it difficult to pay expenditures. In the long run, maintaining the center and its personnel might become a financial burden instead of a source of funds.

I cannot help but wonder about one more thing. Why is it that the cultural heritage of Bulgaria almost always must be damaged to the point of no return only to be expensively and ostentatiously restored? That approach should change. Adequate management and timely intervention or prevention will save not only invaluable pieces of material heritage, but also great amounts of time, energy and public resources, which can be redirected to other intents.

¹⁷ Embassy of Israel – Bulgaria, Facebook, August 29, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=681564197339692&set=a.288855436610572>.

¹⁸ “Foreign visits to Bulgaria in 2022 by Countries and Months,” National Statistical Institute. <https://www.nsi.bg/en/content/1969/arrivals-visitors-abroad-bulgaria-months-and-country-origin>.

Much heritage is irretrievably lost with the current inefficacious model, falling victim to tedious bureaucratic procedures and shady private interests. Fortunately, this was not the case of the Vidin Synagogue.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Cooperate.** The case of the Vidin Synagogue presents a brilliant example of fruitful cooperation between state and municipal institutions on the one side and the non-governmental sector and civil society on the other. This comprehensive approach is highly recommendable for cases in which different interests are at play.
2. **Diversify.** The approach adopted by Vidin Municipality in drafting the project and seeking funds for its implementation offers a successful model that can be applied to other similar cases, especially in the context of EU member states. Where funds are insufficient at a local level, regional authorities should apply for funding through one of the financial instruments and operational programs of the European Union aimed at regional development, sustainability, tourism or environmental protection.
3. **Adjust.** Adjusting the purpose of religious monuments and new approaches to remembrance practices is particularly applicable to religious sites that have lost their original function due to the absence of community representatives or confession. In Vidin, Jewish heritage is put to new purposes while its essence is preserved and properly exposed to the public.
4. **Reach out.** The Jewish diaspora is a highly valuable asset in Israel's relations with other countries. Bulgarian Jewry is well-placed and involved in the relations between Bulgaria and Israel. It serves as a bridge for revitalizing intercultural and intergovernmental dialogue on a popular and political level. Israel should welcome and support more actively any grassroots initiatives related to the preservation of shared material and spiritual culture.

– *Stilian Steffanov*



Photo by Shutterstock



Photo by Israel Embassy in Bulgaria

The Vidin Synagogue Before and After Renovation

THE NETHERLANDS: RED CARD TO ANTISEMITES

On May 6, 2023, the Amsterdam police arrested 154 supporters of the Dutch professional soccer club AZ Alkmaar after the fans were suspected of scanting antisemitic texts in the metro on the way to an Ajax vs. AZ Alkmaar match. The AZ supporters were arrested on the charge of group defamation, denoting the act of making false and damaging statements about a group of people.

The arrests sent an important signal and set a precedent regarding the number of people arrested.

In 2019, research by the Dutch Public Prosecution Service showed that antisemitic incidents accounted for 41% of all discrimination cases in the Netherlands. Of these, the majority (32%) were soccer-related.¹

Antisemitism has been a part of professional Dutch soccer for decades. It generally appears around matches of the Amsterdam club Ajax, because of the club's Jewish image. This image developed because Ajax used to have a relatively large Jewish fan base before the Second World War. Ten percent of the city of Amsterdam's population was Jewish before the war, and the first Ajax stadium, De Meer, was based in a neighborhood located in eastern Amsterdam where most of the residents were Jewish. However, only four Jewish players and two Jewish directors have represented the club. In that sense, its Jewish image is largely based on myths.²

It was actually the Ajax fans who adopted a Jewish image and started using the term "Jews" in self-reference during the 1970s. Since then, Ajax supporters have used the Israeli flag, yarmulkes, and stars of David as their badge of honor. Ajax fans chant "Jews" and "super-Jews" in support of their club.

This phenomenon triggered chants, banners and gestures from competing clubs that were antisemitic. The lyrics of these chants and songs include references to the Holocaust, the SS, the gas chambers and "Jew-hunting." Other songs make reference to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and rival fan clubs have used the Palestinian flag.

On May 6, 2023, the chants for which the AZ-supporters were arrested included "Cancer Jews, olé olé," " Hamas Hamas, all Jews to the gas" and "Whoever doesn't jump is a Jew and all Jews must die."³ That these songs sounded in the Amsterdam metro just two days after Dutch

¹ "Criminal Discrimination in Focus: 2017 [Dutch]," Publication by the Netherlands' House of Representatives, January 25, 2019, pp. 20, 25, https://www.om.nl/binaries/om/documenten/publicaties/discriminatie/lecd/cijfers-in-beeld/cijfers-in-beeld/om_strafbare_discriminatie_in_beeld_2017+%281%29.pdf.

² Michiel de Hoog, "Feyenoord-Ajax Knows One Loser Today: History [Dutch]," *De Correspondent*, October 28, 2015, <https://decorrespondent.nl/3539/een-verliezer-kent-feyenoord-ajax-vandaag-sowieso-de-geschiedenis/397cbf47-cdee-0296-3e27-0ea288ea1921>.

³ "Public Prosecutor: 'They Sang about Jews and Nouri,' yet AZ-Supporters won't be Prosecuted [Dutch]," *NH-Nieuws*, September 5, 2023, <https://www.nhnieuws.nl/nieuws/324242/om-er-is-gezongen-over-joden-en-nouri-toch-worden-az-supporters-niet-vervolgd>.

Memorial Day (May 4, the national day of commemoration for the Dutch victims of the Second World War) made the incident all the more shameful and horrific.⁴

Fans of rival teams claim that their texts are directed against Ajax (whose supporters call themselves Jews) and not against Jews. However, even though the texts do not target Jews directly, they are antisemitic in nature and have triggered antisemitism in the social sphere beyond the soccer stadiums.

Rival fan clubs' usage of the word 'Jew' has increased the word's negative and offensive connotations.⁵ The Dutch Jewish advocacy organization Center for Information and Documentation Israel (CIDI) reported that in 2022, antisemitic songs and chants known from the soccer scene were heard outside the walls of the stadium, including in classrooms, entertainment venues, and restaurants.⁶

The bodies responsible for responding to antisemitic incidents in Dutch soccer include the soccer clubs, the Dutch National Soccer Association (KNVB), as well as municipalities and law enforcement agencies. These bodies, at times, have to be pushed to action by Jewish or anti-discrimination advocacy organizations. Soccer clubs have various tools at their disposal in the event of antisemitic manifestations, including direct warnings to the public and suspension from matches in the event of continuous chants.

Rival soccer clubs that do not take effective action against their supporters could also be placed under certain sanctions, for example, not allowing their supporters to attend the next match. In other instances, monetary fines were imposed by the KNVB on soccer clubs for not doing enough to stop antisemitic expressions during matches at their stadium or by their fan clubs.

On May 6, 2023, one of the reasons that the police were able to intervene was that their forces were present in the metro in large enough numbers. This is not always the case. In addition, logistically, it is easier to arrest people when they are in a subway rather than in a stadium.⁷ The Amsterdam police noted that “the purpose of the arrests was to put an immediate end to further insults and disruption of the public order.”⁸

Criminal prosecution of the perpetrators has proved challenging because criminal charges can only be filed against individuals for their actions. In the case of the 154 AZ supporters who

⁴ May 4 officially commemorates all civilians and members of the armed forces of the Kingdom of the Netherlands who have died in wars or peacekeeping missions since the beginning of the Second World War. Three quarters of Dutch Jews were murdered during the Second World War; a number that is proportionally much higher than that of other Western European countries such as Belgium and France.

⁵ Joram Verhoeven, “Football-related Antisemitism Compared,” Anne Frank House, June 2015, https://www.annefrank.org/en/downloads/filer_public/db/2d/db2d8481-5a32-4d4b-b695-498849e71d1e/football-related-anti-semitism-compared_2016.pdf.

⁶ “Monitor of Antisemitic incidents in the Netherlands, 2022 [Dutch],” CIDI (Center for Information and Documentation Israel), June 26, 2023, <https://www.cidi.nl/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/CIDI-Monitor-antisemitische-incidenten-2022-26-06-2023.pdf>.

⁷ “National Coordinator for Combating Antisemitism Calls Mass Arrest of AZ Fans ‘Important Signal’ [Dutch],” NOS News, May 7, 2023, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2474190-antisemitismebestrijder-noemt-massa-aanhouding-az-fans-belangrijk-signaal>.

⁸ Interview by the author with The Amsterdam Police Department’s public relations officer, November 9, 2023.

were arrested in May 2023, the police were unable to gather conclusive evidence to establish a clear link between the individual members of the arrested group and the antisemitic chants heard from the group. This led the Public Prosecution Service to decide not to prosecute.⁹

A representative of the Public Prosecution Service explained to the author that the type of conclusive evidence it needs in order to prosecute would be camera footage, preferably including sound, which proves each individual's exact contribution to the criminal act.¹⁰ The spokesperson further added that it is the task of the police to gather such conclusive evidence and that soccer fans have been sentenced to community service for similar charges in the past.¹¹ The cases that led to criminal prosecution almost always combined antisemitic expressions and vandalism. On May 6, 2023, of the 154 supporters arrested, the large majority were released after a few hours, while only eleven of them spent the night in prison because of additional charges of vandalism and violence against police officers.

Although the possibility of imposing consequences for antisemitic expressions by large groups of soccer fans appears rather limited, the May 6, 2023, arrests highlight the option of exercising a zero-tolerance approach through law enforcement intervention. It shows individuals and groups who think antisemitic chants are legitimate that they, in fact, engage in criminal activity. This sends a strong signal to sports fans and to society at large.

The police intervention in the Amsterdam metro was applauded by the Dutch National Soccer Association, the Mayor of Amsterdam, Jewish organizations, and NGOs combatting antisemitism and discrimination. The soccer club AZ Alkmaar, as well as national newspaper editorials, all condemned the actions of the AZ fans. A spokesperson for CIDI was pleased with the police intervention because it “finally set an example of a good tit-for-tat policy.”

Policy Recommendations

1. **Fight Harder.** The Dutch National Soccer Association (KNVB), Dutch soccer clubs, police and municipalities should resolve to respond to soccer-related antisemitism more swiftly and overwhelmingly, as was done on May 6, 2023. All too often, perpetrators remain anonymous, and the consequences of their behavior are inadequate for deterring antisemitic behavior.
2. **Punish Individuals.** To effectively fight antisemitism, it is crucial that individual fans, rather than groups at large or the teams they root for, are punished. To that end, more funds should be invested in innovative technology that facilitates the identification of perpetrators. The technology for smart cameras with sound recognition, including means to guarantee privacy,

⁹ “Group defamation immediately stopped by police intervention before the Ajax-AZ match [Dutch],” Public Prosecution Service, September 5, 2023, <https://www.om.nl/actueel/nieuws/2023/09/04/door-ingrijpen-politie-groepsbelediging-voor-wedstrijd-ajax-az-direct-gestopt>.

¹⁰ Interview by the author with The Netherlands Public Prosecution Service's public relations officer for the Amsterdam region, November 7, 2023.

¹¹ See for example: Judgment of the District Court of Rotterdam of September 25, 2017, case no. ECLI:NL:RBROT:2017:7296 [Dutch], <https://uitspraken.rechtspraak.nl/#!/details?id=ECLI:NL:RBROT:2017:7296>, and “Community Service for Antisemitic Slogans [Dutch],” *Opportuun* no. 5, November 2021, <https://magazines.openbaarministerie.nl/opportuun/2021/05/taakstraf-voor-antisemitische-leuzen>.

already exists and has proven effective.¹² In the event of police arrest, audiovisual materials can prove the individual’s criminal act and enable criminal prosecution of perpetrators. In other cases, this technology could serve to track down perpetrators and impose a stadium ban together with additional sanctions.

3. **Encourage Commitment.** Efforts from the soccer clubs’ leadership to take concrete steps to eliminate antisemitic expressions among their supporters and in their stadiums should be encouraged. It will also be useful to develop responsibility among soccer clubs, soccer players and fan clubs to spread information about antisemitism and what it causes.

– *Dr. Joyce Van de Bildt*

¹² “Monitor of Antisemitic Incidents in the Netherlands, 2022 [Dutch],” CIDI (Center for Information and Documentation Israel), June 26, 2023, <https://www.cidi.nl/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/CIDI-Monitor-antisemitische-incidenten-2022-26-06-2023.pdf>.

THE UNITED STATES: REVIVING AN ALLIANCE

Last year, as the rapper Ye (formerly known as Kanye West) was having a very public antisemitic meltdown, some on the political right asserted that his antics were not the rantings of a self-described bipolar person, but rather a manifestation of a larger and more troubling problem: Black antisemitism.¹ A concurrent scandal involving Kyrie Irving, a Black professional basketball player who promoted an antisemitic documentary on social media, along with several violent attacks on visibly Jewish New Yorkers – some of which were committed by Black perpetrators – fed the perception that the African American community was simmering with rage against Jews.

The three-month period when these incidents were unfolding (October to December 2022) marked a nadir in Black-Jewish relations and possibly the lowest point since the Crown Heights riots in 1991.² Yet, in the year that has passed since then, some heartening progress has been made to repair the historical Black-Jewish alliance.

The most significant development was the July relaunch of the Congressional Caucus on Black-Jewish Relations, with the backing of the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the National Urban League. The purpose of the Caucus, initially launched in 2019, is “to ensure open dialogue and partnership between the two communities.”³ In the past, the Caucus supported legislation to combat all forms of racism, convened a roundtable of Black and Jewish organizations, and joined social media campaigns in support of American Jews.

In the realm of academia, there have been some creative efforts to address antisemitism on college campuses. David Machlin, an economics professor at Adelphi University in Long Island, New York, organized a trip for 18 Black and Jewish students to visit both the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC.

Machlin said the purpose of the March trip was “to motivate students to all use their platform and stand up to combat racism, intolerance and antisemitism together.” He noted that “antisemitism

¹ “Black antisemitism,” though widely used in the popular press, is a fraught term, as it suggests (wrongly, I believe) that antisemitism emanating from the African American community is somehow different, and possibly more sinister, than antisemitism emanating from other racial, ethnic or religious groups. No serious person describes the actions of, for example, the white nationalists who marched in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2018 chanting “Jews will not replace us” as “white antisemitism” or the violent acts of Hamas terrorists as “Muslim antisemitism.” So why should we use it here simply as shorthand for the antisemitic beliefs that some, but not all, Black people hold.

² On August 19, 1991, a car in the motorcade of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the leader of the Chabad Hasidic movement, struck two Black children, one of whom died. The accident touched off several days of rioting, during which Black residents of Crown Heights attacked Orthodox Jews and looted businesses. One Jewish man was murdered, and dozens were injured.

³ “American Jewish Committee Helps Relaunch Congressional Black-Jewish Caucus,” American Jewish Committee, July 13, 2023, <https://www.ajc.org/news/american-jewish-committee-helps-relaunch-congressional-black-jewish-caucus>.

is not just a Jewish issue, nor should combatting racism be just a Black issue.”⁴ Adelphi University received a Higher Education Excellence in Diversity award in recognition of the Two Museums Program (TMP) and other diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

Machlis solicited feedback from the students and staff who participated in the program. One Black student wrote that it “helped me truly witness and understand the destruction that ignorance can bring to a group of people. If there’s one thing I took away from TMP, it’s to be proactive rather than reactive.” A Jewish student wrote that: “receiving a greater understanding of how these groups were and still are oppressed and hated drives me to want to do more in the fight against hatred, oppression, antisemitism, and racism.” A Black member of the Adelphi staff who went on the trip wrote: “It reminds me that we are only one evil thought away from having these same acts of violence committed on mankind, and we must be hypervigilant about hate speech and hate acts of violence.”

Machlis said he planned to take another group of students to the museums in the fall of 2024. In the meantime, he is raising money to expand the program to other universities within driving distance of the two museums and to record related video content that can be distributed online.

At Xavier University of Louisiana, a historically Black Catholic university, a group of students created a series of videos to educate students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs, institutions of higher education established before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 with the purpose of serving mainly blacks) about the history of Black-Jewish allyship. In the videos, the students ask their peers trivia questions such as “Which HBCU did Albert Einstein guest lecture at?” and “What was the name of the Jewish civil rights activist who helped found the NAACP?”

Jamaya Davis, a co-creator of the Still We R.O.S.E. project, said the goal was to “break down barriers...and reach across the aisle with open hearts and minds.” The Department of Homeland Security awarded it first place in its Invent2Prevent competition, which encourages students to develop projects to prevent violence and terrorism in their communities.⁵

Beyond university campuses, public lectures and conversations involving Jews, non-Jewish Black people and Black Jews were held in cities across the United States. For example, in the Bay Area of California, a group of artists and activists held a series of panel discussions at local high schools about the history of Black-Jewish relations and the points of tension between the communities.⁶

In December 2022, ADL CEO Jonathan Greenblatt announced that the organization would hold “community conversations” to build bridges between African Americans and Jews. “I think so often our communities don’t interact, don’t engage, don’t hear one another,” he said

⁴ Sara Weissman, “Addressing an ‘Epidemic’ of Hatred,” *Inside Higher Ed*, March 29, 2023, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2023/03/30/inaugural-trip-black-and-jewish-adelphi-students>.

⁵ Gina Christian, “‘Still We R.O.S.E.’—Xavier University of Louisiana Students Win National Prize for Project Countering antisemitism,” *The Dialog*, July 21, 2023, <https://thediolog.org/black-catholics/still-we-r-o-s-e-xavier-university-of-louisiana-students-win-national-prize-for-project-countering-antisemitism/>.

⁶ Andrew Esensten, “What Does the Black-Jewish Alliance Look Like in 2023? In a Word, Messy,” *J. The Jewish News of Northern California*, February 2, 2023, <https://jweekly.com/2023/02/02/what-does-the-black-jewish-alliance-look-like-in-2023-in-a-word-messy/>.

on “The Breakfast Club,” a popular morning show on a hip-hop radio station in New York.⁷ A spokesperson said ADL had begun planning those conversations with input from the family of Martin Luther King, Jr., National Action Network and other partners. However, the spokesperson said the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in October forced ADL to postpone further planning until a later date.

Online, a small group of content creators who are both Black and Jewish have been pushing back against antisemitic stereotypes, Holocaust denialism and criticism of Israel in videos they post on Instagram and TikTok. They include Tova Ricardo (@tovathepoet), Raven Schwam-Curtis (@ravenreveals), Shekhiynah Larks (@shekhiynahl), and others. By sharing their stories and knowledge, these creators are allowing social media users to see the diversity and complexity of the American Jewish community.

Ricardo, for example, expresses her pride in being both Black and Jewish on Instagram, where she has more than 13,000 followers and posts calls to action. “You don’t need to be Black to stand up for Black lives,” she wrote on May 9, 2022.⁸ “You don’t need to be Jewish to stand up for Jewish lives. Hating Black folks won’t end antisemitism. Hating Jewish people won’t end anti-Black racism.”

Schwam-Curtis, who has over 100,000 followers on TikTok, has created videos on an array of topics, including her identity as a Black Jew, Jewish communities around the world, Jewish traditions, race, and whiteness. One of her most popular videos, which was viewed 1.5 million times, is titled “Unpacking Black and Jewish Stereotypes.”⁹ Her content caught the attention of the White House, which invited her to interview Doug Emhoff, the Jewish husband of Vice President Kamala Harris, about his efforts to combat antisemitism.

Some of the videos that Larks posts for her 35,000 followers on TikTok deal with race and white supremacy in the US. In an October 2022 video, she argues that the idea that Black people are “the original Jews” – an idea promoted by Ye and radical Hebrew Israelites – is an antisemitic lie. “Have there always been Black Jews? Yes,” she says in the video, which has been viewed 222,000 times and received 1,500 comments. “Is every Black person Jewish? No. Was there ever a point where every single Black person was Jewish? No.”¹⁰

She has also posted videos addressing misconceptions about the Holocaust, such as that it was an instance of “white on white” violence. In 2021, Larks called out a popular Black TikTok

⁷ The Breakfast Club, “Jonathan Greenblatt on Combatting Anti-Semitism...,” YouTube, December 7, 2022, <https://youtu.be/wVXclclBtTU?feature=shared>.

⁸ Tova Ricardo (@tovathepoet), “You Don’t Need to be Black...,” Instagram, May 9, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CdW1zYcpG2z/>.

⁹ Raven Schwam-Curtis (@ravenreveals), “Jokes Like This are a Reminder...,” TikTok, June 21, 2023, <https://www.tiktok.com/@ravenreveals/video/7247179583500389678?lang=en>.

¹⁰ Shekhiynah Larks (@shekhiynahl), [No Video Title], TikTok, October 13, 2022, <https://www.tiktok.com/@shekhiynahl/video/7154191665597615402?lang=en>.

creator who “liked” an antisemitic video about Anne Frank. She encouraged him to do teshuva (atonement), and in response, he vowed to do better.¹¹

The importance of the above-described initiatives cannot be overstated. Since at least the 1960s, surveys have shown that African Americans hold antisemitic views at higher rates than members of other racial groups in the U.S. A 1964 survey by the Anti-Defamation League – then known as the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith – found that 45% of African Americans were prejudiced against Jews. By 1992, the percentage of African Americans who ranked the “most antisemitic” in their views, according to the ADL, declined to 37%. However, that was still more than twice the percentage of white people (17%) who earned the same ignominious designation. Notably, these percentages declined as the level of the respondents’ education increased.¹²

More recently, a 2016 ADL survey found that 23% of African Americans showed “antisemitic propensities,” compared to 14% of the general population and that these percentages had been consistent since 2007.¹³ Any reasonable person would say the data reveal a real and troubling phenomenon. In a New York Times column last year, the Black, non-Jewish scholar Michael Eric Dyson wrote, “Black antisemitism is real; so is Jewish racism.”¹⁴ Another Black, non-Jewish commentator, Mike Freeman, argued in USA Today that “there is a significant strain of antisemitism among Black Americans” and that Black people have a “blind spot” when it comes to Jews.¹⁵

Black Jews, who as members of both Black and Jewish communities have more skin in the game, frame the issue differently. “There needs to be a moratorium on the phrase ‘Black antisemitism.’ It’s the same antisemitism,” Yitz Jordan, the Black Jewish rapper who goes by Y-Love, told me in a recent interview. He said Black people are just as susceptible as non-Black people to picking up and spreading antisemitic stereotypes and conspiracy theories.

Kendell Pinkney, a Black rabbi, echoed that sentiment in a 2022 essay. “Despite the number of books on such topics,” he wrote in the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, “Black antisemitism is not a thing, just like Jewish anti-Blackness is not a thing. Rather, antisemitism and anti-Blackness are long-standing structures of social prejudice that all peoples and societies fall prey to.”¹⁶

¹¹ Gabriel Greschler, “TikTok User Who ‘Liked’ Antisemitic Video Gets a Lesson in Atonement,” *J. The Jewish News of Northern California*, February 4, 2021, <https://jweekly.com/2021/02/04/tiktok-user-who-liked-antisemitic-video-gets-a-lesson-in-atonement/>.

¹² “20% in U.S. Hold Bias Against Jews,” *The New York Times*, November 22, 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/11/22/us/20-in-us-hold-bias-against-jews.html>.

¹³ “A Survey about Attitudes Toward Jews in America,” Anti-Defamation League, 2016, https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/ADL_MS_Survey_Pres_1_25_17.pdf.

¹⁴ Michael Eric Dyson, “Black and Jews, Again,” *The New York Times*, November 20, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/20/opinion/kyrie-irving-kanye-west-antisemitism.html>.

¹⁵ Mike Freeman, “Black Athletes and My Community’s Blind Spot When It Comes to Antisemitism,” *USA Today*, November 2, 2022, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/columnist/mike-freeman/2022/11/02/black-athletes-community-blind-spot-antisemitism/10652472002/>.

¹⁶ Kendall Pinkney, “Kanye West’s Hate Speech Awakens My ‘Triple Consciousness’ of being Black, Jewish and American,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, November 2, 2022, <https://www.jta.org/2022/11/02/ideas/kanye-wests-hate-speech-awakens-my-triple-consciousness-of-being-black-jewish-and-american>.

The sources of Black resentment toward American Jews have changed over time. Still, it is generally understood that the fundamental tension is over Jews' success at becoming "white," meaning they achieved levels of social acceptance and economic and political power that Black people and other people of color have been unable to achieve due to the forces of white supremacy. As James Baldwin wrote in an oft-cited 1967 essay: "The Jew profits from his status in America, and he must expect Negroes to distrust him for it. The Jew does not realize that the credential he offers, the fact that he has been despised and slaughtered, does not increase the Negro's understanding. It increases the Negro's rage."¹⁷

Baldwin described other resentments, including economic ones (he wrote that many landlords and shopkeepers in Black neighborhoods of New York were unscrupulous Jews) and philosophical ones (he asserted that Jews could not fully understand how "desperate" the plight of African Americans was at that time).

In the civil rights movement, Jews and Black people famously collaborated to achieve racial justice gains. Then, during the Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Black activists pushed Jews and other white liberals out of civil rights organizations in the name of Black self-determination.¹⁸ Meanwhile, certain racialized forms of antisemitism¹⁹ emerged from new religious movements that were exclusively or predominantly Black. They include the Nation of Islam, whose leader, Louis Farrakhan, rails against "the Satanic Jew" in speeches, and the more extremist of the Hebrew Israelite sects that blame (white) Jews for stealing their identity from them. (It is worth noting that only a small percentage of the African American population belongs to these movements.)

Today, one of the major wedge issues is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some Black people sympathize with the Palestinians, whom they see as an oppressed people of color fighting against European colonizers. Black opposition to Israel goes back to at least 1967, when, following Israel's victory in the Six-Day War, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee published an article in its newsletter calling Israel an "illegal state" and accusing it of mistreating both Arabs and dark-skinned Jews.²⁰ In 2016, the Movement for Black Lives, which represented more than 50 Black organizations, published a platform in which it described Israel as an "apartheid state" that was carrying out a "genocide" of the Palestinians. Israel was the only country other than the USA that the Movement for Black Lives mentioned in the foreign policy section of its platform. For their part, Jews have felt betrayed when Black leaders failed to quickly and forcefully denounce antisemitic speech or violence by members of their communities.

¹⁷ James Baldwin, "Negroes are Antisemitic because They're Anti-White," *New York Times*, April 9, 1967, https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/29/specials/baldwin-antsem.html?source=post_elevate_sequence_page.

¹⁸ For more on the history of the Black-Jewish alliance, see "Strangers & Neighbors: Relations between Blacks & Jews in the United States," edited by Maurianne Adams and John Bracey (1999); "Broken Alliance: The Turbulent Times Between Blacks and Jews in America" by Jonathan Kaufman (1995); and "Black Power, Jewish Politics: Reinventing the Alliance in the 1960s" by Marc Dollinger (2018), among other titles.

¹⁹ Antisemitism Worldwide Report for 2022, Tel Aviv University and Anti-Defamation League, April 2023, https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2023-04/AntisemitismWorldwide_e.pdf.

²⁰ SNCC Newsletter, June-July 1967, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/sv/6707_sncc_news-r.pdf. Civil rights leaders A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin condemned the article as antisemitic.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Empower Black Jews** to lead educational and other outreach efforts in Black communities. Black Jews and other Jews of color typically enjoy greater credibility in Black spaces, yet the number of Black Jews in leadership positions at major American Jewish organizations remains low. In 2020, a study found that only two of the 51 member groups in the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations had a Black Jew on their board of directors.²¹ These organizations need to make concerted efforts to recruit and retain Black Jewish leaders.
2. **Amplify the voices of Black Jewish** content creators on social media. In many cases, these creators can communicate more effectively with non-white users than white Jewish creators. The audience for their messages on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok is huge and skews young, meaning they have the ability to shape perspectives on issues concerning Jews, Judaism and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
3. **Reciprocity is important**, and efforts to combat antisemitism in the Black community must accompany efforts to combat anti-Black racism in the Jewish community where it exists.

– **Andrew Esensten**

²¹ Robin Washington, “Appoint Black Jews to Major Organization Boards — Now,” *MyJewishLearning*, June 17, 2020, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/2020/06/17/appoint-black-jews-to-major-organization-boards-now/>.

THE ARAB WORLD: ONE GOD, ONE COMPOUND

Interreligious prayer (also commonly referred to as inter-religious rituals and interfaith worship) is one of the most challenging and controversial forms of interreligious dialogue. It confronts believers with delicate issues of fidelity and integrity and, as such, has traditionally been approached with caution and reserve by the world's major religions. Nevertheless, over the past few decades, religious scholars have identified a trend of interreligious prayer facilitated by greater contact among people from different religions.

There are several motivating factors for interreligious prayer. One is universalizing theological doctrines, which assert that different religious traditions are particular manifestations of a unified and transcendent divine reality. In monotheistic religions, for instance, universalizing theologies stress the existence of a singular God that watches over all of providence and cares for the whole of humanity. These theologies emphasize that particular visions of God in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity are secondary expressions. Universalizing theologies support shared prayers that rest on universal spirituality and individual search for an inner connection to the transcendent reality.¹

Interreligious prayer can also be motivated by social considerations: to express solidarity towards another religious group, to promote religious reconciliation, and to gain a better appreciation and understanding of the religious other.

Marianne Moyaert, a scholar of religions, argues that engaging with another religion's prayers and rituals allows one to reach a deeper level of familiarity with it, which would not have been possible through other forms of interreligious dialogue. This is because religious rituals embody tacit knowledge – the non-codified, experience-based knowledge of a religion. This tacit knowledge is the primary religious language that forms the basis of socialization into a religious tradition.

As Moyaert explains, “the devout spiritual life is rooted in concrete, seemingly arbitrary and non-essential practices.” The tacit knowledge carried within religious rituals can never be made fully explicit in scripture or religious text. Therefore, those who seek to gain a fuller understanding and appreciation of other religious traditions may be drawn to interreligious prayer gatherings.²

In 1986, Pope John Paul II gathered 160 religious leaders representing 32 Christian religions and 11 non-Christian world religions, including Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, among others, to the World Day of Prayer of Peace in Assisi, Italy. However, as the Pope stressed, the religious leaders came together to pray for peace and not to pray together. The day began

¹ Julia Ipgrave, “Case Study 3: Religious Rituals,” in Julia Ipgrave, ed., *Interreligious Engagement in Urban Spaces: Social, Material and Ideological Dimensions* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2019), pp. 213-221.

² Marianne Moyaert, “Inappropriate Behavior? On the Ritual Core of Religion and Its Challenges to Interreligious Hospitality,” *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 27:2 (2014), pp. 222-242.

with separate prayers by each religious group in a different church. Then, in the evening, they all gathered in the square before the Tomb of St. Francis, where each religious leader came forward to say a prayer for peace according to their tradition while the others listened in silence.³

The case of the World Day of Prayer for Peace represents one model of interreligious prayer gatherings, known as serial interfaith occasions or multireligious prayer. In this model, each religious group performs their own prayers in a sequential order, while participants from other religions listen and watch but do not actively participate. The rationale of this model is to show respect and appreciation for the religious traditions of others while maintaining the integrity of one's own.

Another common model of interreligious prayer is the guest/host model, where participants from one or more religious groups serve as guests at a gathering organized by a different religious tradition. The guests are generally allowed to participate as they wish or not at all, as long as they adhere to certain basic "rules of the house." The guest or host prayers often have social objectives rather than spiritual or religious ones.⁴

A third interreligious prayer model is inter-riting, united interreligious prayer, or integrative religious prayer. Unlike the other models, these prayers are intended for people to come to pray together rather than coming together to pray. There are no clear hosts or guests, and the goal is for everybody to participate in a common prayer. In inter-riting, there is an attempt to reach the "highest common denominator," seeking to find the uniting themes among the different religious traditions. These types of prayers pose a particular challenge to the believer because they actively participate in rituals that are foreign to their own.⁵

As Moyaert notes, rituals and prayers have objective meanings in religious traditions that transcend the personal concerns and intentions of the believer. This means that even if one does not believe in the meaning assigned to a ritual, they can still be viewed as committing, in a fundamental sense, to that religious tradition.⁶

Alongside these three models identified in the academic literature, we can identify a fourth, more novel, yet fascinating, model of interreligious prayers commonly known as interreligious worship spaces. While the traditional models encapsulate singular events that bring different religious faiths together, interreligious worship spaces permanently house two or more religious groups under the same compound. They offer believers the chance to encounter and experience religious diversity on a daily basis. In most cases, there is some degree of physical separation between the houses of worship of different religious groups.⁷ This could serve to generate a profound sense of security among worshipers, alleviating anxieties about the potential dilution of one's own faith.

³ Michael Amaladoss SJ, "Inter-religious Worship," in Catherine Cornille, ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 87-98.

⁴ Kathleen Mary Black, "Interfaith/Interreligious? Worship/Prayer? Services/Occasions? Interfaith Prayer Gatherings," *Religions* 13:6 (2022), p. 489.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Marianne Moyaert, "Inappropriate Behavior? On the Ritual Core of Religion and Its Challenges to Interreligious Hospitality," *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 27:2 (2014), pp. 222-242.

⁷ Wikipedia: Interfaith Worship Spaces (2023), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interfaith_worship_spaces.

While still rare, interreligious worship space initiatives have become more prominent in recent years, motivated by spiritual, social and political objectives. One of the most ambitious projects in this spirit is the Tri-Faith Commons in Omaha, Nebraska. Formally established in 2020, the center brings together in permanent residence a church, a mosque, a synagogue, and an interfaith center on 15 hectares in the American heartland. The four structures are connected by the Abraham Bridge, which serves as a focal meeting point for the three religions. There is also a Tri-Faith Garden and Orchard, where the different congregations come together to grow vegetables and fruits for those in need. The Common's programs, which are open to the general public, champion religious pluralism, dialogue and social justice. One such program is Taste of Tri-Faith. The project comprised an annual series of weekend worship services in the three worship houses where visitors can learn about the communities while breaking bread.⁸

Another interreligious worship space that is currently under construction is the House of One in Berlin. The sanctuary, supported and funded by the German government, is set to house a church, a synagogue and a mosque under a single roof on Leipziger Strasse. On this site, the oldest church in Germany stood for 750 years.

The three worship places in the House of One will surround the central hall (the largest room in the building where the three religions will engage in cultural, artistic, academic, and religious exchanges). A loggia above the central hall, standing 32 meters above the ground, will give visitors a beautiful view of the city. Upon laying the first cornerstone of the building in May 2021, President of the Bundestag Wolfgang Schäuble called it a “location of tolerance and openness” and stressed the importance of the project for promoting interreligious dialogue and fighting fanaticism and violence.⁹

The relatively new and yet underexplored model of interreligious prayer is at the core of two unique projects that have emerged in the Arab world in recent decades and took significant steps forward in 2023. These are the planned interreligious complex on Mount Sinai and the Abrahamic Family House complex in Abu Dhabi.

In the late 1970s, Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat became the first to propose, during peace talks with Israel, the creation of an interreligious complex on Mount Sinai (Jabal Musa) – the historical cradle of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This spiritual center was intended to house a synagogue, a mosque, and a church, all built side by side as a symbol of fraternity, tolerance and coexistence among the monotheistic religions.

In August 1980, during the holy Muslim month of Ramadan, while secluded in his holiday residence at the foot of Mount Sinai, Sadat called upon believers of all faiths to join him in his historic mission to establish a shared religious complex that would “illuminate the path for

⁸ Tri-Faith Initiative (2023), <https://www.trifaith.org>.

⁹ German Federal Ministry of Housing, Urban Development, and Housing, German Federal Ministry of the Interior, Berlin Senate, House of One, 2023, <https://house-of-one.org/en>, and Kate Connolly, “‘House of One’: Berlin Lays First Stone for Multi-faith Worship Center,” *The Guardian*, May 27, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/27/berlin-lays-first-stone-for-multi-faith-house-of-one-worship-centre>.

future generations.” Egypt began collecting donations for the project, and Egyptian, French, and Israeli designers were selected to draft its architectural plans.¹⁰

Henry Kissinger, who played a pivotal role in the Yom Kippur War armistice agreement and subsequent Israeli-Egyptian negotiations that preceded the 1979 peace treaty, wrote about the profound importance Sadat attached to the Mount Sinai vision. The two became close friends and confidants in Sadat’s final years. As Kissinger recalls, during their last meeting in Washington, DC, in September 1981, Sadat initially invited Kissinger to participate in celebrating the Sinai’s return with the Egyptian people the following March.

However, after a brief moment of reflection, Sadat decided that Kissinger’s Jewish background might cause undue pain to the Israelis if he took part in the celebrations. Instead, he proposed an alternative plan, suggesting that they “let the territory come back. And then, a month later, you and I alone will take a trip through the Sinai, and we’ll go to the top of Mount Sinai, where I intend to build a synagogue, a mosque, and a church. And this will be a more meaningful celebration of the peace process than if you come to Cairo.”

Tragically, just two weeks later, on October 6, 1981, Sadat was assassinated before he could realize his vision.¹¹ Over the years, there have been some calls in Egypt to resurrect Sadat’s project, primarily because of its economic potential to enhance religious tourism to the historic sites of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of Saint Catherine. According to certain traditions, this is where God revealed Himself to Moses, imparting the Ten Commandments and the location of the biblical “burning bush.”¹²

Over the last decade, Egyptian President ‘Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi responded positively to these calls by initiating two projects. The first is an annual conference at the foot of Mount Sinai in Saint Catherine titled “Sinai: The Forum of Divine Religions... Let’s Pray Together.”

The first conference, held in December 2015, was intricately connected to the challenges that the new regime in Egypt has faced following the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood from power in July 2013. These included the construction of an anti-Islamist national identity; the establishment of a new religious discourse to counteract the radical Islamic ideas of ISIS and support Egypt’s fight against terrorism, especially in the Sinai Peninsula, where there were thousands of casualties and where significant damage was caused to the tourism sector; and a shift in focus to mitigating interreligious tensions between Egyptian Muslims and Christian Copts.

Thus, since 2015, these international interreligious conferences have officially aimed to denounce terrorism and extremism, highlighting Egypt’s pluralistic and rich religious heritage,

¹⁰ “Nida’ al-Ra’is al-Sadat ila Kull al-Mu’minin li-Isham fi Binaa’ Majma’ al-Adyan al-Thalatha bi-Sina,” August 6, 1980, <http://www.anwarsadat.org/>.

¹¹ University of Maryland, Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace & Development, “Remarks by the Honorable Henry Kissinger,” May 4, 2000, <https://sadat.umd.edu/events/remarks-honorable-henry-kissinger>.

¹² Sayyid al-Qimni, “Ka’bat Sina,” *al-Hiwar al-Mutamaddin*, March 21, 2010, <https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=208570>.

restoring Sinai's reputation as a safe destination for tourism and promoting interfaith dialogue.¹³ Participants included religious leaders from around the world, some of whom explicitly supported the revival of Sadat's plan for a religious compound.¹⁴

The conferences' primary goal was to strengthen Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt and beyond, with limited Jewish representation and without Israeli participation. At the October 2019 conference in Saint Catherine, the leader of Egypt's Jewish community, Majda Haroun, expressed her joy at representing her faith and attending a forum that unites the three monotheistic religions in a friendly atmosphere.¹⁵ However, since the Covid-19 pandemic, plans to resume the conference have been delayed.¹⁶

The second project, initiated by the Egyptian government in 2020 under the direction of President al-Sisi, is "Tajalli," or in its full name, "The Great Transfiguration on the Land of Peace." With a budget of four billion Egyptian Pounds (roughly 130 million US Dollars), this project aims to develop the area of Saint Catherine, strengthen its spiritual status, and establish it as a global center for religious tourism for Jews, Muslims, and Christians.¹⁷ According to President al-Sisi, this is where God's revelation occurred, prompting the need to develop a vision that pays homage to such a remarkable event.¹⁸

The project was supposed to be inaugurated in 2023, but its official opening has so far been delayed due to financial difficulties – a common occurrence for national projects in Egypt. In May 2023, the Egyptian Minister of Housing visited the project with the Governor of Southern Sinai to oversee its progress.¹⁹

Construction continues, albeit at a slower pace than planned, suggesting a commitment to see the project through, but a new inauguration date has yet to be set. Local officials expressed their hope of welcoming one million tourists annually, as Mount Sinai is the only place of revelation recognized by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (distinguishing it from Jerusalem and Mecca).²⁰

While the "Tajalli," project in Saint Catherine drew some inspiration from Sadat's idea, the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi closely aligns with his original vision. The Emirati initiative to construct a shared religious complex featuring a mosque, a church, and a synagogue was

¹³ "Sinai: The Forum of Divine Religions... Let's Pray Together," State Information Service, September 28, 2017, <https://beta.sis.gov.eg/en/media-center/events/sinai-the-forum-of-divine-religions-lets-pray-together/>.

¹⁴ Abu al-Sa'ud Abu al-Futuh, "Khabir Aathar Yutalibu bi-Ihya' Mashru' Mujamma' al-Adyan bil-Wadi al-Muqaddas," *al-Bawaba*, October 18, 2018, <https://www.albawabhnews.com/3328716>.

¹⁵ Ayman Muhammad, "A'shaqu Misr.. Ra'isat al-Ta'ifa al-Yahudiyya Tabki Athna' Takrimha fi Sant Katrin," *al-Balad*, October 17, 2019, <https://www.elbalad.news/4022198>.

¹⁶ Hani al-Asmar, "'Huna Nusalli Ma'an'.. Ihtifaliyyah 'Alimiyya 'ala Ard 'Sant Katrin,'" *al-Ahram*, October 20, 2021, <https://gate.ahram.org.eg/Massai/News/3051449.aspx>.

¹⁷ Rim Mahmud, "Ba'd Munaqashat al-Ra'is al-Sisi Lahu.. Mashru' 'al-Tajalli al-A'zam' fi Sutur," *al-Dustur*, August 16, 2022, <https://www.dostor.org/4154450>.

¹⁸ "al-Tajalli al-A'zam fi Sant Katrin," MAAT GROUP, April 8, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8JxZ-NKzOz0>.

¹⁹ Isra' 'Abd al-Mutallib, "al-Tajalli al-A'zam fawqa Ard al-Salam.. Madha Hadatha bi-Sant Katrin Ba'd Ziyarat Wazir al-Iskan?," *al-Balad*, May 31, 2023, <https://www.elbalad.news/5789292>.

²⁰ "Huna Tajalla Allah... Aathar Shahida 'ala Tarikh al-Diyanat al-Thalath fi Sant Katrin," *Sputnik*, February 9, 2021, <https://sputnikarabic.ae/20210209>.

first introduced in 2019 following the signing of the Document on Human Fraternity by the Pope and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar in Abu Dhabi. The House was inaugurated in February 2023 and opened to visitors the following month. Despite the similarity in name, the Abraham Family House has no direct connection to the Abraham Accords signed in September 2020 between the UAE and Israel.

The three houses of worship are designed with equal stature, size, and materiality to eliminate any sense of hierarchy. The Mosque is oriented towards Mecca, the Church towards the East, and the Synagogue towards Jerusalem.²¹

The Moses Ben Maimon Synagogue is the first official Jewish prayer house to open in the UAE, providing respectful representation of the Jewish religion in the heart of an Arab capital and representing another significant milestone in the recent development of public Jewish communal life in the country.

Alongside the three structures, which are separated and isolated from each other to preserve their autonomy, the Abrahamic Family House offers shared interfaith spaces for learning, gathering, and connection. The complex also includes a research center and a library which houses a collection of books on biblical studies, Talmudic studies, Islamic studies, and interfaith studies. It offers educational programs designed to facilitate interfaith dialogue, it organizes seminars hosted by each of the three places of worship, and it invites academics and influencers for discussions, while avoiding controversial political topics.²²

Each house of worship maintains its distinct rituals and holidays, welcoming visitors from diverse faiths to discover them. Last September, on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, about 150 Jewish residents of the UAE gathered at the Moses Ben Maimon Synagogue for traditional celebrations. They read Torah portions from a scroll dedicated to the memory of Sheikh Zayed, the founding father of the UAE. The scroll, presented in 2019 to his son Muhammad Bin Zayed by the local Jewish community, was transferred from the Presidential Palace to the synagogue in preparation for the first Rosh Hashanah in the sanctuary. During the Israel-Hamas war, the synagogue conducted special prayers for healing and redemption.

A guided tour of the Abrahamic Family House offers a brief overview of the three monotheistic religions and their shared representations and ideals, including the olive branch as a symbol of peace, concepts of purity and the significance of water in rituals. One instructor noted to the authors that Muslims adopted the practice of removing shoes upon entering a mosque from the biblical story of Moses. For him, a key message visitors should take and share from the House is that differences are the spices of humanity.

In the eyes of its founders, the Abrahamic Family House conveys spiritual messages. According to its official website, the vision is “for people to come together in peace,” celebrating diversity in faith. Its mission is to foster “common humanity through the exchange of knowledge,

²¹ “Our Mission & Vision,” Abrahamic Family House, <https://www.abrahamicfamilyhouse.ae/about-us#our-mission-vision>.

²² “Programming and Activities,” Abrahamic Family House, <https://www.abrahamicfamilyhouse.ae/education-dialogue#research-and-publications>.

dialogue, and the practice of faith.” Its core values are “peaceful coexistence, inclusivity, and the promotion of human fraternity.”²³

The target audiences of the House are twofold. On the international stage, it draws tourists from around the world, enhances the reputation of the UAE as a global advocate for religious moderation, and contributes to the fight against Islamophobia. One of its distinguished guests was the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, who visited the site in October 2023 and described it as an exemplary model for active exchange between faiths. Blinken, who is Jewish, added that “this is what the future of the region should look like.”²⁴

On the domestic front, the Abrahamic Family House aims to foster national cohesion and the UAE’s identity as a multicultural society, where communities from over 200 countries of origin and diverse religious backgrounds coexist harmoniously.²⁵ As of late 2023, approximately 1,000 worshippers attend Friday prayers at the mosque, and around 800 attend Sunday prayers at the church. Still, in contrast to the growing Muslim and Christian communities at the House, the synagogue’s Jewish community is much smaller as most of the Jewish population of the UAE resides in Dubai.

Both Egypt and the UAE encountered criticism regarding their efforts to establish interreligious venues. Egyptian dissidents accused President al-Sisi of following in Sadat’s footsteps, alleging a dubious agenda to sell Sinai to Israel and the Jews under the pretext of religious coexistence.²⁶ Critics of the Abrahamic Family House insinuated a conspiracy involving a Jewish-Zionist-American plot to create a new religion called “al-Ibrahimiyya,” which they believed could be detrimental to Islam.²⁷ These allegations were refuted by both Emirati officials and the Egyptian Islamic Research Center of al-Azhar.²⁸

Policy Recommendations

1. **Building on existing initiatives** that champion dialogue between Jews, Christians and Muslims, interreligious prayer spaces should also be promoted in Israel. Such initiatives should be carried out incrementally, commencing in areas where the likelihood of success is higher thanks to a history of interreligious pluralism and collaboration, such as Jaffa and Haifa.

²³ “Our Mission & Vision,” Abrahamic Family House, <https://www.abrahamicfamilyhouse.ae/about-us#our-mission-vision>.

²⁴ “US Secretary Blinken visits Abu Dhabi’s Abrahamic Family House,” *The National*, October 15, 2023, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/2023/10/15/us-secretary-blinken-visits-abu-dhabis-abrahamic-family-house/>.

²⁵ Ibtisam al-Kitbi, *Dawr Dawlat al-Imarat fi Tamkin al-Diblumasiyya al-Diniyya* (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Policy Center, 2023), pp. 15, 30, 48-47, 71-66.

²⁶ “‘Sinaa’ Multaqa al-Adyan al-Samawiyya’.. Da’m lil-Iqtisad aw Naz’ al-Huwiyya?,” *Arabi 21*, September 24, 2017, <https://arabi21.com/story/1036388/>.

²⁷ Ofir Winter and Ella Aphek, “The Arab World: Antisemitic Attacks on Normalization,” *Antisemitism Worldwide Report – 2021*, The Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry, Tel Aviv University, 2022, pp. 37-41.

²⁸ “Mujamma’ al-Buhuth al-Islamiyya bil-Azhar Yahsimu al-Jadal fi Mashru’ Bayt al-A’ila al-Ibrahimiyya,” *Bawabat al-Azhar al-Iliktruniyya*, March 18, 2023, <https://www.azhar.eg/magmaa/details/ArtMID/1097/ArticleID/69189/>.

2. **The ethos of East Jerusalem** as a shared interfaith prayer space for the adherents of the three monotheistic religions should be enhanced while respecting the autonomy of each religion in managing its holy sites. To ensure success, a bottom-up approach fostering dialogue and interactions among religious leaders and their communities should be prioritized.
3. **Bilateral religious tourism** between Israel and its Arab peace neighbors should be promoted to bring hearts closer, foster mutual understanding, emphasize shared values, and cultivate shared spaces of economic prosperity.

– Dr. Ofir Winter and Alon Berkman

ACROSS THE WORLD: NATIONAL PLANS AGAINST ANTISEMITISM

In last year's For a Righteous Cause Report, we noted the emerging consensus among governments and intergovernmental organizations regarding the essentiality of confronting antisemitism, preserving the memory of the Holocaust and conserving and developing Jewish heritage and life. One of the important tools offering a framework to mobilize resources, monitor progress, and raise awareness in the fight against antisemitism is developing and implementing national action plans. Such plans have the potential to constitute an important step and proactive response to antisemitism and emphasize a commitment to reducing its manifestations.

In 2023, several more countries published detailed national action plans to combat antisemitism, including the United States, France, Spain, Luxembourg and Latvia, and began working to implement them. Plans are tailored to the needs of each country but share several common foundational objectives, from increasing awareness, education, and understanding of antisemitism to improving safety and security for Jewish communities.

The success of national plans, however, lies in moving from expressing intentions to combat antisemitism to implementing those intentions and translating them into tangible achievements. Indeed, there are a number of challenges and factors that can limit the efficacy of such plans, including lack of political will, inadequate resource allocation, inadequate monitoring and evaluation, lack of legal changes, and changing political landscapes.

In May 2023, the United States released its first comprehensive national strategy to combat antisemitism, outlining actions to be taken by the executive branch, calling for Congress to act, and calling for action by state and local governments and civil society groups and organizations.¹ The new national strategy is based on four pillars: (a) increase awareness of antisemitism and American Jewish heritage; (b) improve safety and security of Jewish communities; (c) reverse the normalization of antisemitism; and (d) build coalitions to fight hate.

The Biden administration's national strategy is the latest effort by the US government to address rising antisemitism, prior to which the Trump, Obama, and Bush administrations and US Congress had developed and advanced a number of federal initiatives. In 2004, for example, President George W. Bush signed the Global Antisemitism Review Act. It established an office of a special envoy to combat antisemitism abroad.² The Biden administration elevated this position to an "Ambassador-at-Large" classification in 2021. In 2006, the Bush administration's Department of Education (DOE) issued a guidance under Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in federally-funded

¹ "The US National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism: Key Actions by Pillar," The White House, June 2, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/06/02/the-u-s-national-strategy-to-counter-antisemitism-key-actions-by-pillar-2/>.

² Public Law 108-332, "Global Antisemitism Review Act of 2004," October 16, 2004, <https://www.congress.gov/108/plaws/publ332/PLAW-108publ332.pdf>.

programs, to protect Jewish students from discrimination unless that discrimination was based on religious faith rather than race.³

Directives issued under the Obama and Trump administrations, particularly President Trump's 2019 Executive Order 13899 on Combatting Antisemitism, reaffirmed and strengthened the 2006 guidance to enforce with the same vigor Title VI against discrimination rooted in antisemitism as with other forms of discrimination covered by the Act.⁴ In recent years, the DOE's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) has opened discrimination investigations at several universities, including the University of Vermont, the University of California-Berkley and the University of Southern California.

Beyond calling on Congress and its members to regularly speak out against antisemitism, the strategy only encourages, but cannot compel, the legislative branch to act in two concrete ways:

- (A) Passing the 2024 budget to fully fund education initiatives (73 million Dollars) and the Department of Homeland Security's Nonprofit Security Grant Program (360 million Dollars), as well as to increase the DOE's OCR budget to 177.6 million Dollars to fund primary and secondary education and to counter antisemitism and discrimination.
- (B) Demanding Congress pass legislation reforming Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act to remove immunity from online platforms and hold social media companies accountable for the content on their platforms. However, at the time the Report went to print, Congress had not yet approved the 2024 budget, only passing a stopgap funding measure to avert a government shutdown. Nor has it passed legislation reforming Section 230 at the time of this writing.⁵

The onus of implementing the strategy largely fell on the executive branch with its numerous agencies, offices, and departments, requiring it to take a number of actions before the end of 2023. Following the publication of the national plan, the DOE launched its "Antisemitism Awareness Campaign," issuing a "Dear Colleague" letter reminding institutions of their obligations under Title VI.⁶ The National Science Foundation (NSF), Department of Homeland Security, and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) were required to expand resources for education on Jewish history and research on antisemitism. The NEH has thus far issued several calls for applications to fund research on antisemitism.⁷

³ Kenneth L. Marcus, "Anti-Zionism as Racism: Campus Anti-Semitism and the Civil Rights Act of 1964," *William & Mary Bill of Rights Journal* 15, no. 3 (2007): 837-891.

⁴ White House, "Executive Order on Combatting Antisemitism," Trump White House – National Archives, December 11, 2019, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-combating-anti-semitism/>.

⁵ "Biden Signs Stopgap Spending Bill to Avert Government Shutdown – White House," *Reuters*, November 17, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/uss-biden-signs-stopgap-spending-bill-white-house-says-2023-11-17/>.

⁶ Department of Education, "U.S. Department of Education Launches Antisemitism Awareness Campaign," May 25, 2023, <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-launches-antisemitism-awareness-campaign>.

⁷ See Collaborative Research Funding Opportunity Number: 20231129-RZ (August 2023) and Funding Opportunity Number: 20231011-DOI-DOC, "Dangers and Opportunities of Technology: Perspectives from the Humanities" (October 2023).

The most significant implementation of the plan was the Biden administration’s extension of the protections of the 1964 Civil Rights Act to include also victims of antisemitism and other religious bigotry to eight other executive departments beyond the Department of Education. Under the instructions, the Departments of Agriculture, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Labor, Treasury, and Transportation will ensure federally funded programs in housing, food programs, and other areas do not discriminate on the basis of religion.⁸

The Biden-led national plan, however, has some weaknesses, especially its failure to adopt a clear definition of antisemitism. While the plan recognizes the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism as the “most prominent” definition of antisemitism, it does not officially adopt it as THE definition. It currently acknowledges the merit of others, particularly the Nexus Definition. To be sure, the Trump administration’s 2019 executive order instructing all executive departments and agencies to use the IHRA working definition remains in force. Nevertheless, the failure to affirm its adoption in the national plan, or select another definition to use for that matter, has implications for policy and enforcement, because an operable definition is needed to guide its investigation, assessment, and enforcement of violations.

The French government unveiled in January 2023 its new plan to fight racism, antisemitism and discrimination, building upon the previous plan that was in effect between 2018 and 2020, but failed.⁹

The plan proposed 80 measures based on five pillars:

- (A) Identifying antisemitism and racism.
- (B) Measuring the phenomenon.
- (C) Improving education and training.
- (D) Strengthening penalties for perpetrators.
- (E) Supporting victims.

The plan includes indicators to assess whether it is working and adds important measures, including training teachers and school staff about antisemitism, training police using the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism to improve reporting of hate crimes, and making the country’s criminal code for antisemitic and racist offenses more severe.¹⁰

In the fall of 2023, two members of the French National Assembly proposed a law addressing the latter measure to strengthen the legal response to racist and antisemitic offenses. According to the proposed law, No. 1727, a non-public racist insult will constitute a 5th-class infraction

⁸ Ron Kampeas, “Biden Expands Civil Rights Act Protections at 8 Cabinet Departments to Include Antisemitism,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, September 28, 2023, <https://www.jta.org/2023/09/28/politics/biden-tasks-eight-cabinet-departments-with-extending-civil-rights-protections-to-victims-of-antisemitism>.

⁹ Robin Richardot, “The Government Presents Its New Plan to Combat Racism and Antisemitism [French],” *Le Monde*, January 29, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2023/01/29/le-gouvernement-presente-son-nouveau-plan-de-lutte-contre-le-racisme-et-l-antisemitisme_6159787_3224.html.

¹⁰ “National Plan Against Racism, Antisemitism, and Discrimination Linked to Origin [French],” French Government, January 30, 2023, <https://www.gouvernement.fr/dossier-de-presse/plan-national-contre-le-racisme-lantisemitisme-et-les-discriminations-liees-a-lorigine>.

entailing a maximum 1,500 Euro fine, while the same public racist insult will be an offense punishable by up to one year in prison and a 45,000 Euro fine.¹¹ At the time this Report went to print, the law had yet to pass.

In January 2023, Spain's Council of Ministers adopted a seven-year action plan to implement the European Union's (EU) strategy to combat antisemitism.¹² The plan, developed in consultation with Spain's Jewish community, builds upon the integration of aspects of the EU's strategy in the country's legal and administrative systems to better accommodate discrimination against the country's Jewish population.

It aims to provide a more robust response to prevent and combat all forms of antisemitism by increasing resources and improving existing laws on equality and discrimination, promoting Jewish life in the country, and expanding the pedagogy, research, and memory of the Holocaust to combat denialism, distortion, and trivialization. The plan called for the establishment of a working group that would be responsible for its implementation, as well as the establishment of a special commission to monitor that progress is indeed being made.

To date, the effectiveness of Spain's national action plan is debatable. Initially praised by the Spanish Jewish community for its active engagement in formulating the plan, Jewish leaders in the country have expressed their disappointment in the lack of public support for the Jewish community amid the rise in antisemitic incidents in Spain following the October 7 Hamas attack. Moreover, the Spanish government has yet to establish the special commission to monitor the plan's implementation.¹³

Latvia and Luxembourg also adopted national action plans to combat antisemitism based on EU guidance in 2023. Manifestations of antisemitism in Latvia are low and mainly occur online. A key component of the plan there focuses on commemoration and remembrance, particularly of the Holocaust and the role of Latvians in perpetrating it with the Nazis. This is as well as adopting the IHRA working definition as a working tool at the national level.¹⁴ Luxembourg's national action plan, adopted in September 2023, shares the common objectives of enhancing security, fostering Jewish life and countering hate speech. How it will be implemented remains

¹¹ Shaya Baldassari, "Racist and Antisemitic Comments: A Bill Tabled to Guarantee Prison [French]," *Le Figaro*, September 14, 2023, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/propos-racistes-et-antisemites-une-proposition-de-loi-deposee-pour-garantir-la-prison-20230914>, and French National Assembly, "Proposed Law No. 1727 – 16th Legislature [French]," October 12, 2023, https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/16/textes/l16b1727_proposition-loi.

¹² "The Government Approves the Plan Against Antisemitism with a Protocol to Deal with Hate Crimes Against Jews [Spanish]," *rtve.es*, January 31, 2023, <https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20230131/gobierno-aprueba-plan-lucha-antisemitismo/2419253.shtml>. To read the plan: "Plan Nacional para Implemenar la Estrategia Europea de Lucha contra el Antisemitismo para 2023-2030," Government of Spain, January 2023, <https://www.mpr.gob.es/prencom/notas/Documents/2023/310123-PlanNacionalAntisemitismo.pdf>.

¹³ Alberto D. Prieto, "Jewish Communities Feel Abandoned by Pedro Sánchez: 'He Needs the Votes of Antisemitites' [Spanish]," *El Español*, October 12, 2023, https://www.elespanol.com/espana/politica/20231012/comunidades-judias-sienten-abandonadas-pedro-sanchez-necesita-votos-antisemitas/801170064_0.html.

¹⁴ "Action Plan for the Reduction of Racism and Antisemtism for 2023," Cabinet, Regulation No. 209, April 13, 2023, <https://www.km.gov.lv/en/media/33024/download?attachment>.

to be seen.¹⁵ Luxembourg was only the 11th EU member state to develop a national action plan, meaning less than half of EU member states have adopted such a plan despite the EU calling on its members to do so by 2023.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Develop National Action Plans.** The majority of EU member states have yet to adopt national action plans. The EU Commission should encourage remaining states to adopt and implement plans without delay, learning from the best practices and effective solutions of others.
2. **Set Objectives.** The obvious should be stated: The objective of combatting antisemitism is that there is less of it. National action plans must include clear, transparent, measurable and attainable goals for the reduction of antisemitic attacks of all kinds.
3. **Invest.** While benchmarks for success and monitoring are necessary, so too is securing the funding required to implement the actions called for. Priorities include enhancing security, training and education on antisemitism, Jewish history, and the Holocaust.

– *Dr. Carl Yonker*

¹⁵ Government of Luxembourg, “Xavier Bettel Presents the National Action Plan to Combat Antisemitism,” Government. lu, September 27, 2023, https://gouvernement.lu/en/actualites/toutes_actualites/communiqués/2023/09-septembre/27-bettel-schnurbein.html.



Hakan Can

MUSLIMS. JEWS. TOGETHER

Hakan Can is the Deputy Head of the Department for Fostering Austrian-Jewish Cultural Heritage and Combatting Antisemitism at the Federal Chancellery of Austria. **Prof. Uriya Shavit**, Head of the Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry, has conducted field studies and researched Islam in Europe for the past 17 years. In the aftermath of October 7, they discussed the future of Jewish-Muslim relations in Austria and the continent at large.

Prof. Shavit: A lot of people have the impression that the Muslims of Europe, with a definite article, are the enemies of Israel and of the Jews. Do you believe that is the case?

Mr. Can: That is far too complex a statement for me to be able to simply agree or disagree because “the Muslim” does not exist. Who would you mean? Me, my wife, someone else?

The Islamic religious community in Austria (*Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft*) condemned the acts of violence and blatant human rights violations of October 7 in strong terms. It also responded to the Pro-Palestinian protests in Austria by calling for the cessation of any form of glorification of violence.

You have to consider that in Austria we have 16 recognized religious communities (*Religionsgemeinschaften*). One of them is the Jewish community (*Israelitische Religionsgesellschaft*). Another is the Muslim community (*Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft*). Ninety percent of the mosques in Austria are under the umbrella of that community, and they condemned Hamas. We also have the Alevi community (*Alevitische Glaubensgemeinschaft*), not to be confused with the Alawites from Syria. These are Alevi Muslims who primarily come from Turkey.

The existence of religious communities with the status of public bodies enables the state to talk directly to their representatives. We are, however, aware that they do not represent everyone. There are around 700,000 Muslims in Austria and the vast majority of them are not under the umbrella of the Islamic Community. Some are secular. Some, even if they attend mosques, are still not members of the official community.

Pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Austria are typically attended by approximately 500 to 700 people. A relatively small number if you consider that there are around 700,000 Muslims in the country. If they were all anti-Israeli, you would see bigger demonstrations.

Note that the majority of Muslims in the country are of Turkish descent. Other significant ethnic groups within the Muslim population include Bosniaks, Albanians and North Macedonians with Albanian roots. Arabs constitute a minority within the broader Muslim community.

Prof. Shavit: Muslims in Europe are divided along so many different lines. Ethnicity creates a major division. It matters whether you are a Turk, a Pakistani, a Bosnian or a Moroccan. It matters a great deal in terms of how you manifest your Islam. Ideologies matter, and personal differences matter. Religio-legal orientations matter. Political orientations matter.

When it comes to relations with Judaism and approaches to Israel, my impression has been that there is great resentment among some people, but more commonly, there is indifference. It is just not something that preoccupies people. There are some European Muslims, including North Africans, who are interested in forging relations with Jewish communities because they realize that they have shared interests and shared experiences. I feel that European Jewish communities and the State of Israel are not exhausting the potential of that goodwill.

Mr. Can: I would like to give you an example of the relations between our religious communities.

Last April, roughly ten Austrian imams and ten representatives of the Islamic community, along with ten representatives from the Jewish community, visited Auschwitz together. The President of the Islamic Community recited from the Quran next to the crematorium, honoring those who were brutally murdered by the Nazi regime.

We also plan to have imams dedicate one day each year to addressing antisemitism in their mosques. This initiative has not been implemented yet, but the intention is there.

In Austria, I can confidently say that the relations between religious communities, particularly between the Jewish and Muslim communities, are good. Some representatives share strong friendships, like one of our imams who, together with a rabbi, visited schools in Austria to talk with students about interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

It is those interpersonal encounters that we need to promote in order to break down prejudices and build mutual trust. We are proud of those relations. You might not, however, have those in countries like France – an example of fractured relations because of the separation between state and religion.

Prof. Shavit: Am I correct that Islam in Austria is more state-supervised and state-regulated than in other European countries? For example, you do not allow the importation of imams?

Mr. Can: After we disallowed this importation, I observed that the youth tend to gravitate towards other mosques with less educated imams. Simply having imams with insufficient education, as opposed to imported imams, is not an ideal alternative, in my opinion.

While I comprehend the rationale behind the policy – aiming for imams who are familiar with Austrian society and proficient in the German language – it is evident that we still face challenges in having a sufficient number of qualified imams.

Personally, I would have preferred an interim solution to address this gap. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that Austria, as a state, is justified in wanting to avoid external influences in religious matters.

Prof. Shavit: There are shared interests between Jews and Muslims. For example, regarding the debates on Halal and Kosher butchering, circumcision, and wearing headscarves.

Mr. Can: Yes, indeed. However, while these issues were previously subjects of debate in Austria, this is no longer the case. There is no sense of urgency among the Jewish and Muslim communities in terms of cooperation on these particular matters.

Prof. Shavit: Tell me something: How does a nice Austrian Muslim boy of Turkish extraction end up being the person responsible for fighting antisemitism in Austria?

Mr. Can: Well, I am an example of the good relations between the communities.

Here is how it happened. In 2010, for my civil service, I spent one year in Jerusalem and volunteered at the Austrian Pilgrimage Hospice.

I chose Israel for a reason. This was right after the Freedom Party had become the second largest political party in Austria and entered the coalition government. One of the items on their agenda was to segregate Austrian children based on ethnicity from other kids in schools. At least that was the claim made during discussions within the Muslim community.

I vividly recall the evening when we were around the dinner table at home.

My mother expressed concern to my father, telling him that if they actually separated children at school, we would move back to Turkey the next day. Attempting to reassure her, I responded, “Mom, it’s just schools.”

She retorted, “That’s how it started with the Jews in Austria; it started with state-regulated separation and culminated in a genocide. At that time, there was no Israel. Now, they have Israel, and it serves as life insurance for all Jews around the world. Our insurance is Turkey.” At the time, we had Turkish citizenship.

This conversation sparked my curiosity about the Jewish people and that is how I found my way to volunteering at the Pilgrimage Hospice.

I worked at the reception, I washed dishes, and I served as a waiter at the hospice’s charming Viennese coffeehouse. You could truly savor the classic Viennese coffee Melange alongside the traditional Austrian Sacher cake.

After that, I studied Political Science at the University of Vienna and then embarked on a diverse professional journey that included a tenure at the Austrian Embassy in Ankara. There I served as an officer for science and cultural affairs.

During a period marked by strained relations between Austria and Turkey, I sought collaborative initiatives and found like-minded people facing similar challenges, particularly among colleagues at the Israeli Embassy. The collaboration led me to delve into the complex issues of antisemitism in both Austria and the Muslim world.

When I returned to Austria, I began working at the Office of Religious Affairs at the Federal Chancellery and specifically engaged with the Muslim community. When the government announced a national strategy for combatting antisemitism, I was entrusted with a pivotal role in that initiative.

Prof. Shavit: Did you ever experience anyone from the Jewish community feeling uncomfortable with a Muslim being the one responsible for combatting antisemitism?

Mr. Can: No, absolutely not. I am very close to the Jewish community. They invite me to relevant events, and I also participate in events hosted by the Israeli Embassy.

The vast majority of Muslims in Austria harbor no issues with Jews. In 2022, we had 719 antisemitic incidents, and 55% of them were attributed to the right, with 20% to the left and only 9% to the Muslim community.

While I certainly don't want to downplay the significance of those 9%, since every percentage is too much, the figures clearly show that antisemitism in Austria stems from various quarters, not just the Islamist scene.

Prof. Shavit: The Turkish public discourse is not devoid of antisemitism. Were you exposed to antisemitism as a child?

Mr. Can: No, never. During my childhood, I regularly attended a mosque and there was never any sign of antisemitism there.

I closely follow Turkish media, and while there is considerable coverage of Erdogan's anti-Israel and antisemitic rhetoric, there are also opposition leaders in parliament who denounce the Hamas attacks as acts of terror.

Prof. Shavit: Is it more dangerous to be visibly identifiable as a Jew in Austria since October 7? Not only in regard to Muslims, but also in general?

Mr. Can: I would say it is. The Reporting Centre for Antisemitism (Antisemitismus-Meldestelle) of the Jewish Community of Vienna (IKG Wien) noted a 300% increase in antisemitic incidents from the month following October 7 to mid-November. This is compared to the same period the previous year.

The days immediately after the attacks, 70% of Jewish parents did not send their kids to school. If they feel that their children are not safe, then I would say yes, there is danger.

Prof. Shavit: In all the years of knowing Israel, Israelis and Jews, what surprised you the most?

Mr. Can: I was surprised at how similar Israelis and Turks are. Very loud and very emotional.

That was my biggest surprise. Realizing the striking similarities between those two groups. The tension between secularists and religious people in both societies is particularly reminiscent. That there is solidarity when it is needed. Turkey, in many ways, resembles Israel more than it does Syria.

What are your thoughts? I assume you have visited Turkey?

Prof. Shavit: I always felt that the two countries are like twins separated at birth. But you know, sometimes the most vicious fights are within the family...

Mr. Can: Indeed, that is true.

When Turks discuss the Ottoman era and the Empire, they often express immense pride that the Sultan invited the Jews who were expelled from Spain to the Ottoman Empire. They take pride that the Jews felt comfortable living in the Empire. It is interesting that individuals can express pride in the kindness their ancestors showed to Jews, and yet, in the next sentence, some make antisemitic comments.

When I visited Israel, I also noted how similar Judaism and Islam are.

While recognizing their differences, I experienced the close affinity between these two religions. I noted the practice of some women abstaining from shaking hands with men due to religious convictions. The shared prohibition on pork and the tradition of circumcision, too. As a political scientist, I posit that Israel is not in Europe, but from Europe. I believe that Turkey is not from Europe, but in Europe.

Prof. Shavit: Did you ever get any negative response from the Muslim community about your job?

Mr. Can: Never. I am often told that it is commendable to have a Muslim in my position as it serves to counter the misconception that all Muslims are antisemitic.

I would like to take this opportunity to emphasize a crucial point.

In 2023, if we cannot collectively protect a minority that has been persecuted numerous times throughout history, then we, as humanity, have failed.

If Jews are not safe in public spaces, then we have gone 80 years back in time. We are all aware of the dire consequences that followed. World War II was not only a catastrophe for the Jews, but for all of humanity.

We, therefore, have to dedicate every effort to fighting antisemitism, racism and discrimination at large.

While people may hold varying opinions on Israeli policies, with settlements and related issues often cropping up, it is crucial to separate those discussions from the events of October 7. The world witnessed an act of terror, and it must be unequivocally condemned as such. I expect every community to denounce it. The terrorist who attacks you today may target me tomorrow.

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