

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The Hamas terrorists were committed to a charter that invokes the fabricated Protocols of the Elders of Zion as a historical reference and blames the Jews for all that is wrong in the West.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.