

An End to Anti-Semitism

The earth may not have shaken, but it was a delightful surprise that at an informal meeting of the plenary of the United Nations General Assembly, held on January 22, 2015, representatives of 37 nations convened to register their disapproval of anti-Semitism. Perhaps most surprising was the comment by the Saudi Arabian representative that anti-Semitism, like Islamophobia, is a crime based on religious hate.

Can the virus of anti-Semitism be controlled? More than a century ago, the Russian doctor and Zionist Leo Pinsker was pessimistic. He wrote of the virus, "As a psychic aberration, it is hereditary; as a disease transmitted for 2,000 years it is incurable." It is poignant but realistic to say that anti-Semitism is the longest continuing form of hatred in history, and moreover, it is the only form of hatred of peoples or countries that is global, even in countries where no Jews have ever been present. At its worst, Jews are seen as an absolute metaphysical evil.

Reports on various countries indicate that anti-Semitic attitudes and anti-Israeli frenzy have been increasing in recent years. A poll by ADL of people in 100 countries concluded that 26% of adults – about one billion people – harbor anti-Semitic attitudes. Among the causes of this increase in anti-Semitic beliefs, in prejudice against Jews, and in hate crimes is the impact of social media and the internet, which have expanded the scale of communication transmitting hate through websites, blogs, and chat rooms.

This transmission spreads fantasies of Jewish conspiracies and of the supposed power of "Jewish lobbies" throughout the world, along with automatic denunciation of any policy of the State of Israel or action in its self-defense against aggression.

Intolerance, harassment, and discrimination against Jews have metastasized even in schools, on college campuses, and in sports arenas. The campus issue has meant not only frequent anti-Israeli demonstrations, but also lack of respect for observant Jewish students and calendar requirements for exams.

On college campuses, hateful conduct by Palestinian and other anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli students has interfered with the learning process for Jewish students and prevented the voicing of pro-Israeli sentiments. Aggravated offenses during sports games have caused the British Football Association to make soccer clubs more liable for the conduct of their fans.

A discomfiting report was recently issued in Britain by the Campaign against Antisemitism. According to various data, it shows that anti-Semitism in Britain has increased, particularly as a result of criticism of Israel for its actions in 2014 in Gaza. In 2013, the last full year of records, there were 529 anti-Semitic incidents in the U.K., a hundred more than in France.

However, care has to be taken in evaluating the analysis of the data and the perceptions of Jews in Britain on the issue.

The data of the general attitudes shows the following: 10% believe that Jews are not as honest as most people; 17% think that Jews have too much power; 20% hold that Jews are less loyal to Britain than are non-Jews; 13% think Jews talk too much about the Holocaust.

Of the 250,000 British Jews, 29% say they have experienced personal anti-Semitic harassments, and more than half say they have witnessed more anti-Semitism in the past two years than ever before. Almost half feel threatened by Islamic extremism. They fear direct violent attacks; they worry about security at schools their children attend; they have spoken of desecration of Jewish gravestones and of anti-Semitic graffiti on public and private property; they have witnessed hate mail on the internet, and anti-Semitism on college campuses.

British Jews consider boycott of businesses selling Israeli products a form of anti-Semitic intimidation. After the massacre at the kosher shop, Hyper Cacher, in Paris on January 9, 2015, they are expressing anxiety about going to Jewish shops in London. The British Jewish novelist Howard Jacobson has spoken of "radical uncertainty which makes one very jittery."

Concerned political leaders in the Western world are increasingly aware of the problem. At least fourteen Western nations have refused to participate in the planned United Nations Durban III Conference. They realize that this supposed forum for human rights, first held in South Africa in 2001, has degenerated into a platform for anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli vitriol, largely on the part of Asian and African countries.

It is now almost a truism that Israel is the canary in the coal mine. Anti-Semitism is not simply a pernicious evil of hate and intolerance, nor simply a threat to the Jewish people as a whole and to the State of Israel in particular. The greater danger, as expressed so succinctly by Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper, is that "[t]hose who would hate and destroy the Jewish people would ultimately hate and destroy the rest of us as well." A similar point was made at the UNGA conference by Harlem Désir, French minister for European affairs, who remarked, "Whenever someone attacks a Jew because of what he is, he is attacking all of us, the community of nations."

Again, we are confronted with the problem of the limits of free speech. Anti-Semitic utterances have led to violence, and of course to the Holocaust, to persecution, and to disturbance of life. The problem is compounded by the link between expressions of anti-Semitism and attitudes to Israel expressed by Palestinians and others.

A perplexing example of this link was the making of foreign

policy by the Muslim mayor of Tower Hamlets in east London, in which about a third of the population comes from Bangladesh.

The mayor flew Palestinian flags and a black Islamist flag like that of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria on City Hall.

Defying a threatening gang of thugs, a courageous 77-year-old Catholic nun, who runs a charity supporting residents in the area, removed the black flag. Similar Muslim makers of foreign policy are the mayors of Bradford and Preston, both of whom flew Palestinian flags on their official public buildings.

In Britain, a stunning instance of anti-Israeli insensitivity was the conduct of a judge, George Bathurst-Norman, in June 2010. In his summing up in a criminal damage trial concerning a company in Brighton involved in the manufacture of weapons components for Israeli F-16 fighter jets, he implicitly compared the Israeli government with the Nazi regime. He said there was no word other than "horrors" for what Israel was doing in Gaza; there were scenes, he said, which one would rather have hoped to have disappeared with the Nazi regime of the last war. Not surprisingly, all the accused were acquitted of conspiracy to cause criminal damage.

In France, after the murders by an Islamist terrorist of four Jews in the kosher shop in Paris, Prime Minister Manuel Valls declared that France without Jews is not France. British home secretary Theresa May, who was shocked by the extent in Britain of anti-Semitism, verbal, physical, and online, made a similar statement: "Modern Britain without a thriving Jewish community would not be Britain. The Jewish community is a vital part of what makes Britain tick."

What is to be done? At a minimum, May called for tough penalties on hate crime, some control over hate speech on campus, and extra security for Jewish schools, synagogues, and communal institutions. But more is necessary, and perhaps that will follow after the UNGA conference. There must be a collective universal effort of education and political

persuasion to dispose of anti-Semitic ideology and indoctrination. That effort should dispose of the myths of Jewish conspiracies to control the world. It should counter the argument that Jews are not loyal to the countries in which they are living. It should inform individuals of the true history of the Holocaust. It should penalize the policies or advocacy of those policies to kill or harm Jews in the name of extremist Islamist ideology

The international community should heed the words of U.N. secretary general Ban Ki-moon on June 21, 2004. He said, "The UN emerged from the ashes of the Holocaust. And a human rights agenda that fails to address anti-Semitism denies its own history."

First published in the