

May 21, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

On behalf of the undersigned Jewish organizations representing diverse Jewish voices and opinions, we write to you to express grave concern over the recent surge of antisemitic attacks here in the United States and around the world, and over social media. We are grateful for the current ceasefire in the conflict between Israel and the terrorist organization Hamas, but we fear that the way the conflict has been used to amplify antisemitic rhetoric, embolden dangerous actors and attack Jews and Jewish communities will have ramifications far beyond these past two weeks. We appreciate your strong stance throughout your career against antisemitism, and urge you to speak out forcefully against this dangerous trend and stand alongside the Jewish community in the face of this wave of hate before it gets any worse.

Since the start of the recent round of violence in Israel, there have been numerous antisemitic incidents around the world and in the United States, as well as on social media. The perpetrators of these attacks deliberately targeted Jewish institutions and individuals for no other reason than their religion, justifying it with age-old antisemitic tropes, exaggerated claims, and inflammatory rhetoric.

In less than two weeks, serious examples of physical violence include an attack against Jews outside of a restaurant in Los Angeles, on the streets of South Florida, and New York's Times Square, and against synagogues in Tucson and Skokie. And, heard in chants and seen on signs in disruption of pro-Israel rallies as well as at many of the anti-Israel rallies, protesters chanted slogans from 'Hitler was right' to 'From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will Be Free.' This phrase calling for wholesale genocide raises fear among many Jews, who recall reports of Arab political and military leaders bragging that they would "push the Jews into the sea," in the years following the founding of Israel.

Internationally, numerous antisemitic incidents have deliberately targeted Jewish institutions. In London, antisemitic incidents increased fivefold since May 8th. A Chinese-run media outlet suggested U.S. policy is determined by wealthy Jews and the Jewish lobby. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan remarked that, "[Israelis] only are satisfied by sucking [Palestinian] blood." These few examples, of many, point to a sharp and deeply troubling increase in antisemitic incidents and rhetoric. And while we affirm the right to debate a government's policies, we condemn the outright attacks targeting Jews and Jewish communities, and any suggestion that these are mere responses to the recent conflict is spurious.

Additionally, on social media, a disturbing array of hateful posts is enabling the spread of antisemitism at a moment of historically high antisemitic incidents. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) on Thursday reported finding 17,000 tweets between May 7 and May 14, a period of escalation in Gaza, with a variation of the words "Hitler was right."

Mr. President, we were proud to stand together to support you and Congressional leaders to ensure enactment of an important bill that advances law enforcement tools to fight all hate crimes, whether against Asian American and Pacific Islander communities, other minorities, or Jews. In the spirit of honoring the intent of that bill and in response to the horrifying increase in antisemitic attacks at home and abroad, we urge your administration to move swiftly to implement and advance the following efforts and initiatives:

Use Your Bully Pulpit to Call Out Antisemitism

Harness the authority of the Presidency and the United States Government to speak out loudly and clearly against antisemitism. At this moment of crisis, all manifestations of antisemitism and other forms of bigotry, scapegoating, and dangerous conspiracy theories, regardless of source, ideology or political affiliation should be swiftly discredited, rejected, and marginalized.

Appoint an Ambassador at Large to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism

In the 116th Congress, the U.S. House and Senate – recognizing the critical and urgent need – passed a bill elevating the role of the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism. For over a decade, the Special Envoy has been critical in urging foreign governments to protect their Jewish communities, establish national coordinators to address antisemitism, and develop and implement policies to combat antisemitism and hate. The presence and efforts of an Ambassador to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism would send a powerful signal to governments around the world that the U.S. takes combating antisemitism seriously and calls on them to do the same.

Reestablish and Fill the Position of White House Jewish Liaison

Recent antisemitic events, coupled with the FBI's latest data showing that anti-Jewish hate crimes accounted for 60.2% of all hate crimes motivated by religion, should be alarming to the Biden Administration. Filling the position of White House Jewish Liaison is necessary in order to have clear channels of communication between the White House and the American Jewish community to foster and cultivate relationships with the greater Jewish community, work with stakeholders to address concerns like antisemitism, and harness the partnership of American Jews and Jewish institutions in our shared agenda.

Hold a White House Convened Conversation on Antisemitism

In that spirit, our organizations and volunteers attend – with great interest – the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships engagement calls. These are powerful tools for informing and mobilizing public-private partnerships, and as such are critical to eradicate antisemitism. We suggest this office take a further step to convene – in person, if possible – stakeholders from the Jewish community, as well as key officials from the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security and the FBI, to discuss the current events and threats, and action steps to address them.

Combat Antisemitism on College Campuses

Preserve the 2019 Executive Order on Combating Antisemitism, a critical tool to ensure university administrators effectively fight antisemitism, along with all forms of hate, while protecting freedom of speech. Also, include specific antisemitic hate crime and incident prevention and response in best practices and guidance for campus administrators and law enforcement.

Invest in Security Enhancements for Religious Institutions

At a time of increased threats from white supremacy, antisemitism, extremism, and hate-motivated violence, significantly increase funding for all houses of worship and other non-profit institutions that government and law enforcement authorities objectively determine are at high risk of attack.

While this is not an exhaustive list, we recognize that eradicating antisemitism, the world's oldest form of hatred, requires a multi-pronged approach.

We are happy to convene a call on any of the above initiatives and stand by as active partners in the fight to eradicate bigotry and advance pluralism. Thank you for your consideration and partnership in the ongoing effort to combat antisemitism.

Respectfully,

American Jewish Committee
ADL (Anti-Defamation League)
Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.
Jewish Federations of North America
Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America