

## **AJC Policy: Countering Antisemitism and Hatred at Home and Abroad**

Antisemitism is experiencing a resurgence at home and abroad, threatening the physical security of Jewish communities around the world and making it more difficult for Jews to practice their religion or safely and openly identify as Jews. Its revival threatens our values and undermines our understanding of what it means to be American. What's more, antisemitism is no longer operating on the fringes; it has gained a foothold across the political spectrum and is increasingly prevalent among prominent political parties and leaders. **Opposition to antisemitism and hatred in all its forms must be unequivocal, and U.S. leadership on this issue must be restored.**

Modern-day antisemitism takes many forms but emerges from three sources – the far right, the hard left, and extremist ideologies propagated in the name of Islam. We've seen many recent examples of antisemitism on violent display such as in Halle, Germany, at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, and the Chabad of Poway, where Jewish worshippers were targeted simply for being Jews. We continue to hear old tropes that paint Jews as having undue influence within society or accusations of Jews demonstrating dual loyalty. Antisemitism drives Holocaust denial and distortion—spreading at an alarming rate in the nations of Europe that carried out these atrocities just two generations ago. Antisemitism is too often masked as anti-Zionism, as seen through the demonization or delegitimization of Israel common in the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement. Whatever its form, the cancer of antisemitism cannot be allowed to spread.

We must embrace and extol our diversity as a nation, **setting pluralism as the standard rather than tolerance.** Our differences enrich our nation; they are not a liability. This was once so obvious as to border on political cliché, but in these times, American leaders must reaffirm this idea as a core American value.

### Countering hate and antisemitism in the U.S.

**American leaders must be unambiguous in expressing their concern about the rise of antisemitism through their words and actions.** Elected officials must stop using hateful rhetoric to divide us and score political points while destroying our nation's moral fabric. It's no coincidence that antisemitism has risen as political rhetoric demonizing minority groups has increased. Nor is it a surprise that antisemitism has been on the rise as politicians have used coded words and images to signal their tacit approval of antisemitic acts, or at the very least, been reluctant to speak out against hate groups, fearing the loss of personal political support. Words matter and so does silence.

Earlier this year AJC released a groundbreaking survey of American Jews' perceptions of, and experiences with, antisemitism in the United States. The national study found that 88% of American Jews believe antisemitism is a problem in the U.S. today, and 84% say it has increased over the past five years. Almost a third of American Jews reveal that they have changed their behavior—won't publicly wear, carry, or display things that help others identify them as Jewish—because they worry about being a target. When citizens of this country report that they must hide who they are out of fear, it should serve as a wakeup call.

To combat antisemitism, a crucial first step is to define it. The **Working Definition of Antisemitism** is a clear and concise description of antisemitism in its various forms. This definition is essential to giving governments, law enforcement agencies, and civil society organizations increased capacity to identify, prosecute, and deter antisemitic incidents. The Working Definition is used by the U.S. State Department when monitoring antisemitism internationally, and the Department of Education. The U.S. should seek its wider adoption among government agencies, as well as local and state governments, and identify other avenues to leverage the benefit of its clear and practical examples. AJC has also endeavored to make it easier to identify and expose hate by creating a new resource, **Translate Hate**, which identifies antisemitism language and tropes and explains how individuals can report hate crimes.

The situation for Jewish students is particularly worrisome. While AJC's landmark survey on antisemitism found that more than a third of American Jewish youths reported experiencing **antisemitism on campus** or knew someone who had, the response of many campuses has often fallen short, leaving Jewish students vulnerable and feeling like outsiders in their own communities. In December 2019, President Trump issued an executive order to strengthen efforts to combat antisemitism on campuses by urging officials to consider the Working Definition of Antisemitism when examining incidents targeting Jewish students. This was a welcome step in fight against antisemitism on campus.

### Improving hate crimes reporting

**More must be done to improve the reporting and prosecution of hate crimes.** According to the latest FBI hate crimes report, Jews were the target of nearly 60% of all religiously-motivated hate crimes—an alarming statistic for a group that makes up less than two percent of the U.S. population. However, hate crime reporting is deeply flawed due to underreporting or complete lack of reporting by state and local law enforcement. There are 80 cities of over 100,000 residents that do not report any hate crimes or simply ignore the standard FBI request for data. Accurate data is essential to understand the extent of the problem and design responses. State and local governments must be pressed to prioritize reporting hate crimes to the FBI, in accordance with the Hate Crimes Statistics Act. The Department of Justice should increase its commitment to work with state and local officials to prosecute hate crimes.

### Addressing white nationalism

While the government must address all forms of bias and hate that lead to criminal action, a comprehensive examination into the violence motivated by white supremacist ideology is necessary as it poses **the most deadly and dangerous threat** to the United States. In 2017, the Department of Homeland Security and Federal Bureau of Investigation warned that white supremacist groups had already carried out more attacks than any other domestic extremist group over the past 16 years and were likely to carry out more attacks in the coming year. An examination of the subject that appeared in *The New York Times* ("Threat of White Nationalism," Nov. 3, 2018) made clear that federal and state governments lack sufficient knowledge concerning the presence and threat of white supremacist groups and of when individuals are likely to act upon their ideology with violence.

### Asserting American leadership to confront antisemitism abroad

Introducing the UN's first-ever human rights report wholly dedicated to antisemitism, Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, referred to antisemitism as the "canary in the coalmine of global hatred" that poses "a threat to all societies if left unaddressed." Where antisemitism appears, other forms of hatred, underlying discord, and societal decay emerge. The U.S. should leverage U.S. influence abroad to support Dr. Shaheed's recommendation that all UN Member States adopt the Working Definition of Antisemitism because it can offer "valuable guidance for identifying antisemitism in its various forms" and serve "as a critical, non-legal, educational tool..." When countries adopt the Working Definition, it sends a powerful signal that antisemitism is being addressed at the highest level.

As the primary U.S. official responsible for promoting efforts to combat antisemitism in foreign countries, **the Special Envoy for Monitoring and Combating Antisemitism should be elevated to the position of Ambassador** and this vital post should report directly to the Secretary of State.

We have seen a steady and significant increase in incidents of antisemitism in Europe, including verbal, physical, and even lethal attacks. **The U.S. must call on all European governments to take the necessary steps to assure the security of Jewish institutions and communities**, invest in education that imparts European values, take on purveyors of

antisemitism on social media, and recognize that vilification of Israel too often is a cover for expressions of antisemitism.

We cannot turn a blind eye to the growing scourge of antisemitism taking hold in the U.S. and abroad. Doing so would be a betrayal of American values and ideals. It's time for the U.S. to restore its leadership on these issues around the world, and to do that, our elected officials must reaffirm these values at home.

*This policy paper is meant to be a resource for candidates. It is one of several that outlines AJC standpoints and policies on issues of core concern to our organization and our community.*

*AJC, founded in 1906, is the Jewish community's global advocacy organization. Its mission is to enhance the security and well-being of the Jewish people and Israel, and to advance human rights and democratic values around the world. In addition to its New York headquarters and its Office of Policy and Diplomatic Affairs in Washington, D.C., AJC has 22 U.S. regional offices, 12 overseas posts, and 37 partnerships with Jewish communities and institutions worldwide.*

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