Israel needs to take action against antisemitism

written by Fleur Hassan Nahoum | 27.11.2024

While hiding in an attic during the Holocaust, Anne Frank wrote, “All we can do is wait, as calmly as possible, for it to end… the whole world is waiting, and many are waiting for death.”

We must take the diametrically opposite approach to the explosion of antisemitism worldwide following Hamas’s October 7 massacre, including the pogrom that took place this month in Frank’s hometown of Amsterdam. We must act in every possible way to defend the Jewish people, in Israel and across the globe.

Following the Holocaust, an oath was made: Never Again. Yet, today we are witnessing the infiltration of antisemitism and the horrifying violence it breeds. The modern-day pogrom that we saw on November 7 in Amsterdam is the manifestation of the growing confidence the Jew-haters have in their numbers.

The misinformation campaigns riddled with lies, extremism, and century-old prejudices have permeated every society in which Jewish people exist today – and some in which there are no Jews.

With the mounting number of threats, intimidation, and violence against Jewish people and their communities, physical assaults have almost become normalized in our daily news.

The November pogrom must be more than a moment of disbelief; it must raise a sense of urgency. We cannot let “Never Again” be a meaningless slogan; it has to be a call for action.

So what can we do?

The answer is simple but profound: Commit to protecting Jews. Commit to the Jewish state.

We have been facing antisemitism for as long as we have been a people and a religion. From the ashes of the Holocaust, a new generation found strength in the

Jewish state. On the night of November 7, the Dutch authorities did not exert themselves to protect Jews who were under attack. Their fate was in the hands of Israel; it was Israel that took action and employed an emergency rescue mission to save our people from this pogrom.

While the State of Israel cannot eradicate the world's oldest hatred, it must take effective action to mitigate it. Israel and its representatives must be careful to respect all local laws and legal requirements outside of its borders, but it nevertheless has a duty to provide support to Jewish communities confronting antisemitism.

Israel's support in the legal arena

ONE IMPORTANT realm in which Israel can provide support is in the legal arena. Within the limits of local laws and regulations, Israel should help provide information and support to legal challenges against boycotts, discrimination, and antisemitism. The government of Israel should also facilitate training programs for lawyers in the Diaspora, equipping them with the skills needed to counter illegal discrimination and lawfare against Jews and Israel.

Israel must also strengthen and build upon its ties to Diaspora communities by focusing on unity and helping bolster Jewish identity. Strengthening Israel-Diaspora relations is an end in itself but it will also help Diaspora Jewry facing antisemitism. Such efforts could be carried out through online learning environments, Zionist youth movements, Jewish summer camps, and empowering local Israeli consulates to work more extensively and effectively with local communities.

Indeed, in the aftermath of the October 7 massacre and the explosion of antisemitism, Diaspora Jewry is seeking a stronger connection with Israel. The Jewish state should embrace them and implement a strategy at the highest levels of government.

Unfortunately, there is too often a lack of such a strategy in the Israeli government. There are several government ministries or semi-governmental organizations that aim to strengthen Israel-Diaspora ties, including the Foreign Ministry, Prime Minister's Office, Diaspora Affairs Ministry, Education Ministry, and what are known as the "National Institutions" – the Jewish Agency, World

Zionist Organization, United Israel Appeal, and Jewish National Fund. While each has its own niche and varying degrees of effectiveness, much more can be done by coordinating their efforts.

The Israeli government should form an inter-ministerial committee for Israel-Diaspora relations, with representatives of the aforementioned ministries on the director-general level, as well as high-level representatives of the Finance Ministry and National Institutions. The committee should be co-chaired by the Prime Minister's Diaspora affairs adviser and the Prime Minister's Office director-general, whose job includes effective coordination between government ministries.

Currently, there is no Diaspora affairs adviser at the Prime Minister's Office. One should be appointed and empowered at the earliest opportunity. Alternatively, the leadership of the task force should be in the hands of the Foreign Ministry, at the director-general level.

Global leaders have a crucial role to play as well. In this big world that we inhabit, values, decency, and moral clarity matter. Now, more than ever, we need world leaders to wake up and act. Apologies without action are simply words with little meaning.

When we stand together, we not only defend Jews but we also defend the rights to democracy and freedom. When we say "Never Again," we also need to say now and always.

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