

# CONFRONTING ANTISEMITISM

## Introduction

B'nai Brith Canada addresses the twin challenges of antisemitism and hate speech, linking them to the broader threat of discrimination and human rights.

In Canada, antisemitism must be vigorously opposed wherever and whenever it occurs, including through the development of an antisemitism component to Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy, and a national action plan to combat antisemitism, under federal leadership, that includes the provinces/territories, cities and law enforcement agencies.

B'nai Brith Canada's ['Eight Point Plan to Tackle Antisemitism'](#) remains a cornerstone of our work. It is closely related to our annual [Audit of Antisemitic Incidents in Canada](#) which, for the year 2019, highlighted the continued, worrying growth of antisemitism in Canada.

We continue to advocate for concrete, realistic actions by all levels of government in Canada to address antisemitism, and to exercise leadership, together with civil society, to ensure this scourge is not permitted to flourish here or elsewhere.

## THE CONTEXT

Hostility towards Jews dates to ancient times. From the days of the Bible until the Roman Empire, Jews were criticized and sometimes punished for their efforts to remain a separate and unique social and religious group.

Over time, religiously based hatred of Jewishness has given way to non-religious criticism: Judaism and its traditions have been attacked as an outdated belief that obstructs human progress. The Jewish desire to remain separate often met with hostility in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, as modern states began to take shape and national pride grew. Jews, still deprived of civil rights and protections accorded others and forced to live as outsiders, were subjected to a hostility that resulted at times in deadly persecution; violent attacks (pogroms) on Jewish communities with the aid or indifference of governments.

As Jews began to integrate into European society, antisemites turned to the new *'racial science'* to *'prove'* the supremacy of non-Jewish whites. The opponents of Jews argued that Jewishness was not a religious but a racial category, and that the Jewish *'race'* was biologically inferior. This belief would later become Nazi Germany's justification for the Holocaust.

In the period since World War II, and after a period of gradual decline, public antisemitism has re-emerged as a threat to the liberal democratic tradition. The hatred of Jewishness and the conspiracy beliefs attached to Jews (control of the political and financial system) have become more mainstream in the past decade. Disagreement over policy towards the State of Israel has created opportunities in which the expression '*Zionist*' – support for Israel as the Jewish homeland – is often used as antisemitic code for '*Jew*' in mainstream debate. Holocaust denial and distortion lie about past events in order to make Jews appear underhanded and evil.

More recently, many countries in Europe and elsewhere are struggling with unsettled economic and social conditions, with movements opposing 'foreigners' or warning of dangers from '*the other*', including recent immigrants and traditional enemies. These movements champion racial or national supremacy, creating the kind of atmosphere that gave rise to persecution of Jews in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Middle East is home to some of the harshest antisemitism in today's world. Nazi-like language is regularly expressed by the media and governments in countries that oppose Israel and the West.

## B'NAI BRITH CANADA'S POSITION

B'nai Brith Canada addresses the twin challenges of antisemitism and hate speech, linking them to the broader threat of discrimination and human rights, a universal issue that affects all Canadians and individuals elsewhere. Antisemitism is but a visible portion of the dangers inherent generally in prejudice and discrimination.

B'nai Brith Canada believes that antisemitism is a continuing problem for communities all over the world, and that it must be confronted directly wherever and whenever it occurs. We have traditionally stressed the importance of Canada having an anti-hate strategy, which could effectively be part of the new federal Anti-Racism Strategy. We have consistently advocated for a national action plan to combat antisemitism, under federal leadership, that includes the provinces/territories, cities and law enforcement agencies at all three levels.

To truly understand antisemitism and to combat it effectively, we recognize that criticism of Israel can often have an antisemitic foundation. At the same time, we recognize that not all criticism of Israel nor its government's policies constitutes antisemitism. This distinction is explicit in the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) non-legally binding, working [definition of antisemitism](#). That definition, with its illustrative examples, has been endorsed by a large number of countries.

In 2018, B'nai Brith Canada published an '[Eight Point Plan to Tackle Antisemitism](#)'. This Plan was updated in 2019 and remains a cornerstone of our work. It is closely related to our annual [Audit of Antisemitic Incidents in Canada](#) which, for the year 2019, highlighted the continued, worrying

growth of antisemitism in Canada. We believe that accurate and timely data, such as that in our *Audit*, is fundamental to understanding the threat of antisemitism; one reason why we are regularly in contact with Statistics Canada on strengthening data collection and analysis.

In our [op-ed of November 5, 2018, in the National Post](#), we argued that a Canadian government apology over the tragic 1939 events of the *MS St. Louis* would be more meaningful if combined with actions to address contemporary antisemitism. Our continuing efforts to raise awareness of the Holocaust and historical antisemitism in Canada, and elsewhere, are expressly linked to drawing meaningful lessons for contemporary society.

The Canadian government's formal adoption in June, 2019, of the IHRA definition of antisemitism is one important step, but work is required to develop policies and programmes to [give the IHRA definition meaning in the Canadian context](#). Concrete application of the IHRA definition will be an essential element of an effective Canadian Anti-Racism Strategy; one which devotes proper attention to the threats to religious minorities in Canada. We are regularly engaged with Canada's Anti-Racism Secretariat to this end, just as we are engaged with the Secretariat in addressing hate more broadly.

We have engaged in dialogue with the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada to emphasize the importance of nation-wide, standardized and mandatory school curricula that teach about both the Holocaust and contemporary challenges of antisemitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, racism and xenophobia.

We have engaged with Universities Canada, the collective voice of Canada's postsecondary education institutions, to stress that antisemitism on campus is growing at an alarming rate and that our universities and colleges must more clearly articulate that this threat to Jewish students will not be tolerated. This dialogue complements our exchanges with individual universities where antisemitism, anti-Zionism and anti-Israel sentiment increasingly threaten the physical and mental health well-being of Jewish students.

We have engaged in dialogue with Canada's mayors, through the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, including the Big City Mayors' Caucus, encouraging Canada's cities to join in the fight against antisemitism, domestically and globally through initiatives such as ['Mayors United against Antisemitism'](#). The Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention has a key role to play in this effort.

We have presented views to the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police on the importance of municipal hate crimes units that have effective strategies, and are properly staffed and trained, to deal with antisemitic hate incidents and hate crimes. This dialogue continues. We are developing generic criteria for municipal hate crimes units to address antisemitic incidents, taking into account valuable resource materials originating with, for example, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe – Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

B'nai Brith Canada has called for creation of a special envoy on antisemitism, to coordinate national efforts in a domestic framework and to contribute to a global campaign against antisemitism. Our July, 2019, [letter to Canada's Foreign Minister](#) on addressing antisemitism in support of international religious freedom makes this clear.

Our specific efforts to raise the profile of the threat of antisemitism target a broad audience. In 2019, we submitted views to Canada's parliament and to Canadian Ministers on two key issues – the threat of antisemitism to liberal democracy in Europe, and the growing problem of [antisemitism in the online space](#). These efforts continue as we engage with the Department of Justice in examining practical legal remedies to address online hate, particularly that of an antisemitic nature.

That antisemitism remains a global threat is underscored by the annual [Kantor Centre Survey of antisemitism Worldwide](#) (to which B'nai Brith Canada contributes) and by the worrying signals uncovered in a [survey of European Jewish attitudes by the Fundamental Rights Agency](#) of the European Union.

In October, 2019, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Mr. Ahmed Shaheed, submitted a [special report on antisemitism, presented to the UN General Assembly](#), to which B'nai Brith Canada contributed. This report is of fundamental importance as part of a larger effort to ensure that UN human rights mechanisms address the rise in antisemitic incidents globally and to ensure that antisemitism is seen as a human rights issue.

*"There is not a more graphic example than the Holocaust of how religious and racial hatred can lead to genocide and the destruction of societies,"* said Mr. Shaheed in his [report](#). B'nai Brith Canada is building on this principle as one of its planks in confronting the scourge of antisemitism.

We are emphasizing to the Canadian government that it must effectively leverage Mr. Shaheed's report on a continual basis and must engage meaningfully with the newly appointed [United Nations Focal Point](#), Mr. Miguel Moratinos, designated by the Secretary-General to monitor antisemitism and develop responses to it.

## Moving FORWARD

To carry its objectives further, and with a new Canadian government having taken shape after October, 2019, elections, B'nai Brith Canada has authored several documents emphasizing the need to confront antisemitism domestically and globally:

A November 20, 2019, [letter to the Prime Minister](#) stating that

- The Government should develop and **implement a national action plan to combat antisemitism**, under federal leadership, with a commitment to pursue **standardized and mandatory education**

[curricula on antisemitism and the Holocaust](#) in the provinces and territories. This includes appointment of a national coordinator to lead the effort.

A November 27, 2019, letter to the Ministers of Multiculturalism and Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, stating that:

- There must be Government-led action, now, to vigorously [rebut those who criticize Canada's endorsement of the IHRA definition](#) of antisemitism and that a coordinated campaign is required to educate government leaders, parliamentarians, officials and educators about the IHRA definition.

A December 2, 2019, [mandate letter to Canada's Foreign Minister](#), stating that:

- The Department of Global Affairs should [create the position of Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism](#), with a mandate to share best practices with other countries and international organizations and apply what lessons we learn from them in a domestic context.
- The Department must diligently pursue the recommendations in the UN Special Rapporteur's report on antisemitism. This should mean that [provision of Canadian development assistance resources to governments, organizations and NGOs will be assessed through a lens of how well potential recipients are working to address antisemitism](#).

A September 4, 2020, [letter to the Prime Minister](#), on content for the Speech from the Throne, including:

- A need to emphasize that [addressing racism, antisemitism, hate speech and hate crimes is a public safety issue](#), not just a multicultural issue; and that combating these is one element in countering radicalization to violence.
- A need to providing resources from government programmes focused on [strengthening digital literacy to deal with online hate and, specifically, online antisemitism](#), in line with Canada's signature of the 'Christchurch Call to Action' and the announcement of a new '[Digital Charter](#).'

As the COVID-19 pandemic surges globally, antisemitic, xenophobic, and hateful messages and conspiracy theories are proliferating rapidly, particularly online. These messages spread hate and disinformation, undermine public health measures, and elevate fear and anxiety. [We believe](#) that western liberal democracies, including Canada, must collectively address the threat of COVID-19-related disinformation in its broader meaning and antisemitism being promoted as a result.

These ideas, and our ongoing work to highlight and take action against antisemitic incidents throughout Canada, are illustrative of B'nai Brith Canada's commitment to the Jewish community and our unflinching objective of rooting-out antisemitism wherever and whenever it occurs.

## FOR REFERENCE

In addition to data presented in our annual [Audit of Antisemitic Incidents in Canada](#), our efforts to deal with antisemitic incidents on a regular basis in Canada can be found on the [Communications Centre](#) page B'nai Brith Canada's website - or through a web search using the tag terms 'B'nai Brith Canada' and 'antisemitism'.

To see the Canadian input provided by B'nai Brith to the annual global survey of antisemitism, consult the [Kantor Center Annual Report on Antisemitism Worldwide](#).

OCTOBER, 2020