

6 Things Every City and Its Leaders Can Do to Combat Anti-Semitism

Read Time: 3 Minutes 14 Seconds

The world is witnessing an ominous rise in anti-Semitism. The history of the 20th century forbids us to stand idly by and do nothing. “Never again” must mean something.

Whether it be recent anti-Semitic attacks in New York City, the necessity of guarding synagogues and Jewish schools in Europe against harassment and violence or a world-famous celebrity claiming that Hitler had many “redeeming qualities,” our witness of what is happening all around us must stir us to action.

That’s why, back in December, the Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM) hosted its “Mayors Summit Against Antisemitism” in Athens, Greece. Mayors, deputy mayors and municipal officials from more than 50 cities around the world were in attendance, including Mayor Eric Adams of New York, and many other major global cities. This fostered a dialogue on what various cities are already doing to help prevent the world’s oldest form of bigotry.

At the summit, we outlined a six-point program for combatting antisemitism at the municipal level that any and every city ought to employ:

1. Appoint a Coordinator – Appoint a coordinator responsible for liaising with the city’s Jewish community and organizing the municipal-level response to incidents of anti-Semitism. When a crisis occurs, government officials often appoint a task force to determine what went wrong and how to make things right. Well, anti-Semitism has reached a crisis level, so it

needs the time and attention it deserves.

2. Adopt the IHRA Working Definition of Anti-Semitism – This definition, from the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, is the most authoritative, comprehensive and widely-accepted tool used to delineate contemporary manifestations of anti-Semitism across the ideological spectrum.

The definition is as follows: “Anti-Semitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.” It includes factors such as condemning all Jews for the actions of some, questioning the legitimacy of the existence of the State of Israel, denying Jews their right to self-determination, applying double standards to Jews, comparing contemporary Israeli policy to the Nazis, holding Jews collectively responsible for the actions of the State of Israel and Holocaust denial.

3. Municipal Support for Interfaith Tolerance – Allocate municipal resources for initiatives fostering interfaith tolerance, understanding and harmony. When people from differing backgrounds and religions come together, socialize and find common ground, walls will begin to break down and former rivals will become friends.

4. Zero Tolerance – Enforce a zero-tolerance policy for anti-Semitism, with municipal officials uniformly speaking out to condemn each and every local act of Jew-hatred. Anti-Semitism is often both loud and clear, and so our repudiation must be loud and clear as well.

5. Education – Devise an educational plan to train municipal staff and law enforcement personnel how to detect and react to all forms of modern-day anti-Semitism. Many forms of anti-Semitism linger beneath the surface before they gain traction.

Those in power need to understand what we're up against, and that means time and resources to start learning.

6. Celebrate – Celebrate Jewish American Heritage Month, or the European Day of Jewish Culture with annual municipal programming. Highlighting the rich and storied history of the Jewish people in the U.S. and Europe, and pointing to the positive contributions of Jews to American and European culture, will go a long way in helping others to love and appreciate their Jewish neighbors.

“Never Again” Must Mean Something

- ✖ The goal of our efforts is straightforward: we want to help cities protect Jewish communities around the world.

There are many good national policies in place to help combat Jew hatred. But we also need legislation and commitment at the local level. We want to help local leaders understand their responsibility to forge interfaith relations among various communities so that people of all backgrounds can live together peacefully.

It's up to each of us to be a good neighbor. That includes defending our neighbor from bigotry and harm. It means defending them against false accusations and slander. And it means protecting them against physical threats and attacks. None of us would accept such things directed against our own ethnicity, religion and families. We should not accept it when it is directed against our Jewish friends and neighbors.

We've all seen the headlines. So, if we truly mean “Never Again,” then the time to act is now. {eoa}

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