

A Statement from the Baltimore Community Task Force on Antisemitism

The Baltimore Jewish community is alarmed by the uptick in antisemitism, prejudice and hate that we are seeing in our community, in our nation, and around the world. To that end, we offer the following statement to guide discussions, policies and actions to confront antisemitism.

Emboldened radical left and right wings, resurgent global nationalism, economic displacement and inequities, aggressive de-legitimization campaigns against Israel, and the weaponization of social media are all contributing factors in the rise in publicly expressed antisemitism and other forms of hatred.

Antisemitism today may look different from generations past. This requires us to become more diligent, more creative and more resolute to call out and fight antisemitism in all forms. We must develop allies and we must also be willing to engage with those who commit antisemitic acts through dialogue and education.

For ourselves and the communities we live in, we must define antisemitism and articulate key principles about how to respond in a forceful and unified manner.

What Is Antisemitism?

To combat antisemitism in our community, it is critical to define what antisemitism is – and what it is not. Simply put, antisemitism is hostility to or prejudice against Jews.

The widely accepted International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s Working Definition of Antisemitism defines antisemitism as “a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

Antisemitism may take the form of religious teachings that proclaim the inferiority of Jews, for instance, or political efforts to isolate, oppress, or otherwise injure them through verbal or physical violence. It may also include stereotypical views about Jews having disproportionate influence on the world.

Confronting and Condemning Antisemitism

Antisemitism should always be confronted and condemned in the appropriate manner, and without exception. The identity of the hater or the hated is not a mitigating factor.

Antisemitism must be exposed and confronted by allies. There is no excuse for others to stand idly by or be apathetic. Allies are a strategic and moral force multiplier.

Similarly, in the battle against bigotry, to have allies, one must be an ally. Combating bigotry, in all its forms, is a core Jewish value. The Jewish community cannot stand on the sidelines as others are attacked, and yet still expect others to come to its defense. Dialogue and coalition-building with other communities must be a priority.

Antisemitism and Israel

It is possible to criticize the government of the State of Israel and/or its policies without being antisemitic. However, we must be careful to recognize that such criticism often crosses the line into antisemitism. Examples include using antisemitic tropes to describe Israel or Israeli behavior, denying Israel's right to exist, declaring that Israel's very existence is racist, or applying double standards by requiring of Israel a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.

Education and Understanding

The Jewish community must combat antisemitism and other acts of bigotry, racism and hatred through education. It is our responsibility to create teaching and learning opportunities for members of the broader community.

Not everything said or done that is antisemitic is done by someone who is antisemitic or bigoted. People do not necessarily understand the history of the words they use or the images they evoke. Everyone makes mistakes and everyone can learn. But persistent apathy toward antisemitism constitutes complicity.

Apologies for bigoted actions should be embraced when accompanied by: (a) a sincere openness to education; (b) a public correction or retraction of the action; and (c) a commitment to help avoid future incidents.

This statement is a call to action. Expressions of hatred are on the rise, and this is especially true with expressions of antisemitism. We must recognize it, confront it, educate about it, and join together with like-minded people opposed to hatred and bigotry.

Credit: Portions of the wording of this statement were adapted from previous work of the Anti-Defamation League, Jewish United Fund of Chicago, Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, and JCRC of Indianapolis.