



## Avi Benlolo

President and CEO, Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center, Canada

# The Anti-Semitic Shooting is Our Problem, Too

Posted: 3/19/12 2:01 PM ET

The murder of [Rabbi Jonathan Sandler](#) and his three and six-year-old sons, Gabriel and Arieh, and the headmaster's ten-year-old daughter Miriam at a Jewish school in Toulouse, France must be condemned and the perpetrator/s found and brought to justice. "All the House of Israel mourns the antisemitic murders of a Jewish teacher, his two small children, and another ten-year-old child who were gunned down outside of a Jewish day school in Toulouse, France this morning," [said Rabbi Marvin Hier](#), founder and dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

Is it too early to judge? No. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [called](#) the murders a despicable attack motivated by antisemitism. In [another report](#) Meir Habib, Deputy Chairman of the Council of French Jewish Institutions, said, "We have no doubt that the attack was antisemitic -- It is certain. Killing children from close range just because they are Jewish is an unimaginable horror. These are innocent children." Israel's opposition leader Tzipi Livni also [responded](#): "The attack on the French Jewish school is shocking and painful. Israel and the Jewish people are partners in the struggle against antisemitism and hate crimes."

It was an attack on the heart and soul of the Jewish community in France reverberating around the world. For every mother and father who kisses their children goodbye every morning at the school drop-off and understands the vulnerability of that situation, it is heart wrenching to imagine how a place of innocence, safety, and love could be transformed in a moment by a cold-blooded killer.

Thousands of Jewish parents -- like other faith-based parents -- choose to send their children to religious schools. For Jewish parents who send their little ones to a Jewish school, there is a related and disproportionate measure of risk and vulnerability. There is continuous anxiety about the safety of their children -- is the school protected enough? Should additional measures be taken considering recent incidents in the Middle East?

That vulnerability is especially true of societies that have an exceptional number of antisemitic groups intent on intimidating Jews on the one hand and defaming the State of Israel on the other. Jews who are fighting antisemitism are combating not only a clash of civilizations, but a clash of antisemitism. The modern antisemites have fused together historic antisemitism comprised of antisemitic canards like "Jews make Matzah out of Christian blood" or "Jews control the world" with the new antisemitism, including the depiction of Jews as colonizers of their ancestral land -- Israel -- or equating Israel to an apartheid state.

As antisemitism once again rears its ugly head like an age old evil that has resurfaced from the shadowy depths of history, Jews and those who care about them will continue to stand strong and fight.

Antisemitism in France has been a serious problem since "the beginning of the 2000s," says Ron Azogui, the Chief Executive of the Service de Protection de la Communauté Juive (SPCJ) -- the private French agency responsible for the protection of the Jewish community. Tragically, antisemitism has become such a threat in France that its Jewish community has implemented measures to combat the growing trend by forming its own protection service.

According to Azogui, "The SPCJ observes the existence of a sustained high structural level of close to 500 antisemitic events per year...in spite of effective action by police departments and the justice system in pursuing perpetrators." In his 2011 letter to me, he observed that: "It is crucial that preventive policies be intensified to counter this trend in the long run. Developing programs to educate and raise awareness of antisemitism among the youngest populations constitutes the second necessary facet of a sustained and effective approach to eliminate expressions of antisemitism."

To his credit, France's President Nicholas Sarkozy cancelled his schedule and flew to Toulouse as a show of solidarity with the Jewish community. Giving a speech in front of Ozar Hatorah Hebrew School, he condemned the attack and promised to find the perpetrator.

Although Jews are its primary victim, it must be understood that antisemitism is not a Jewish problem to be treated only by Jews and their institutions. Antisemitism is a problem that must be treated and acted upon by governments, universities, and civil society.

Often times, institutions are not adequately aware or prepared to engage in their own complicity in fomenting antisemitism. It only takes one individual to be inspired to

commit an antisemitic act like the one committed in Toulouse. Today's slaughter should be a wake-up call for all individuals and institutions who have yet to take modern expressions of antisemitism seriously.

Added Notation: Dr. Shimon Samuels, Simon Wiesenthal Center Director for International Relations, who is based in Paris, is closely monitoring developments in France as authorities strive to identify the perpetrator and apprehend all those involved in this heinous crime. Rabbi Marvin Hier is urging that all Jewish institutions review their security procedures in conjunction with local law enforcement.