



No single solution to hatred

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The winds of change are blowing for Jewish communities all over the world. A shocking poll released recently by a European Union agency found that 76 per cent of Jewish people polled believe there has been an increase in anti-Semitic hostility in their European home countries. Close to half of the poll's respondents (46 per cent) are afraid of being verbally attacked or harassed because they are Jewish, while more than 23 per cent said they had actually been discriminated against recently.

Hate is a mutating illness that knows no borders and has no boundaries. Canada has not been immune to pernicious anti-Semitism and Israel defamation. For the last 13 years, we have been battling anti-Jewish hate on university campuses, at gay pride parades and on city streets, all the while seeing vicious propaganda and slander adopted by unions and church groups. Families and neighbourhoods that have been hit by anti-Semitism struggle with the age-old question – “Why us?”

The rise of anti-Semitism, whether by stealth as practised by university students, or the more overt methods employed by radical Hezbollah supporters, is real and must not be ignored or played down. This is particularly true of university campuses, where students and faculty alike have spearheaded the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement against Israel.

How we as the Jewish community of Canada engage with problems of anti-Semitism, defamation of Israel and the threat to democracy and human rights will ultimately define not only who we are today, but also our very future.

We are fortunate to be residing in one of the most dynamic and engaging communities in the world, with supportive federal and provincial governments. But with the seeds of hate being planted today, can we take our comfort for granted? The new proposed Quebec charter of values is an example of how the tide of religious freedom can easily turn. Although one Parti Québécois candidate has already had her knuckles rapped for suggesting the removal of the word “Jewish” from the name of Montreal's Jewish

General Hospital, it seems safe to say we can expect increasing incidents of anti-Jewish hate in Quebec if the charter becomes law.

As history shows, there is no single solution to anti-Semitism. Any suggestions to the contrary must be looked upon with suspicion. I support all community methods of advocacy, education and programming as a convergence of efforts to push back.

The Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center has found that the most successful strategy has been to build a sphere of influence outside of the Jewish community. Most non-Jews are revolted by the sight of anti-Semitism and anti-Israel sentiment. By harnessing friendships with educators, police, governments, community and religious leaders, we can strengthen our efficacy. Projects such as Freedom Day, Tools for Tolerance, Compassion to Action, Speakers Idol, diversity workshops and now, the new Tour for Humanity mobile Tolerance Education Center, allow us to engage with the world.

Alone, we are a light unto the nations. Together, with friends who share our values, we become a beacon of light that can transform the entire universe.