

AS ANTISEMITISM INCREASES, WHAT CAN WE DO?



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The Iron Dome missile defence system protected Israeli citizens from rockets launched by the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas in this month's brief conflict. With pin point accuracy Iron Dome defended cities and towns by shooting down missiles in the air.

As we fight against a rising tide of antisemitism and struggle to defend the legitimacy of the State of Israel against intolerant voices, Canadians search for an equivalent shield against hate. Every day we bear witness to renewed attacks meant to defame Israel and intimidate the Jewish people. Here at home, York University's Graduate Student Association voted for a boycott, divestment and sanction resolution against the State of Israel, while a pro-Israel professor at the University of Montreal found the words "Heil Israël" scrawled on his office door last week. A few weeks before, an anti-Israel play was sold out at the University of Toronto and more recently, at Western University an anti-Israel group held "Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine Week". "

Just this week the Ottawa Citizen published an editorial written by a Carlton University professor in which he highlighted the divisions among faculty members, and between professors and students, relating to antisemitism on campus. The author noted it was the university's decision to fire Hassan Diab, a man facing charges for multiple murder and terrorism in the 1980 bombing of a synagogue in Paris, that led to the intra-faculty dispute; he felt it was shocking the university hired the man in the first place.

The situation is not only getting worse for Jews on university campuses. Recently, we learned of a plan by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers to travel to the World Social Forum in Brazil to support the "Free Palestine" movement which promotes boycott, divest and sanctions against Israel. And sadly, a Quebec radio host who last week willingly allowed a caller to remark on his live show that the Holocaust was "the most beautiful event" in world history, and followed up on this comment by voicing his own blatant antisemitic stereotypes, was suspended without pay for only one month; FSWC believes he should be fired for promoting flagrant antisemitism.

The Jew as an individual and as a nation is targeted for antisemitism through malicious campaigns and rhetoric which aims to turn the modern state of Israel into Nazi Germany and Israeli soldiers into SS officers. A well known commentator remarked on a Toronto radio program that Gaza is an open air prison and its citizens live on several calories a day - a veiled reference comparing Gaza to a Nazi concentration camp. What this commentator failed to mention was that Hamas, the terror group that runs Gaza, also practices state sponsored antisemitism as enshrined in its Charter.

Our government has clearly affirmed through the Ottawa Protocol to Combat Antisemitism that denial of the Holocaust and denial of Zionism, (the right of the Jewish people to their homeland), and denial of the Jewish connection to this homeland, is tantamount to antisemitism. But despite a strong report issued by the Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Anti-Semitism in Canada which identified universities as key problem areas, antisemitism continues to proliferate.

As the scales of balance and fairness tip ever more severely, what can we do?

To begin, we must learn the lesson of Iron Dome and stand up and fight for justice for Jewish communities and individuals when necessary. We must double our efforts through intensive advocacy and education, including programs such as Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center (FSWC) workshops on the Holocaust and genocide. Programs such as Freedom Day, which speak of justice and human rights to thousands of students, must be strengthened. Our vision to build the Tour for Humanity, a mobile tolerance education bus designed to bring our programs to communities outside the Toronto Area, must be built. We must continue to support others in their own efforts to fight for freedom and tolerance.

Just as importantly, we must realize that we have numerous friends who support our commitment to tolerance, democracy and human rights, and share our concerns about hate and antisemitism. This is worth remembering as we continue to promote the ideals of respect and civil discourse against the rule of force by those motivated by less inclusive values.