OP-ED: A call to action to confront antisemitism in Canada

Lawyer Sergio R. Karas writes, "Canada must also increase immigration security to prevent foreign actors, hate mongers, and terrorist supporters from entering the country."

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By: Sergio R. Karas

Sergio R. Karas, principal of Karas Immigration Law Professional Corporation, is a certified specialist in Canadian Citizenship and Immigration Law by the Law Society of Ontario, Division Chair of the ABA International Law Section, past chair of the Ontario Bar Association Citizenship and Immigration Section, past chair of the International Bar Association Immigration and Nationality Committee, and a fellow of the American Bar Foundation.

Canada is facing an alarming surge in antisemitism – a phenomenon that strikes at the heart of our open, multicultural society. Police-reported hate crimes have risen for six consecutive years, reaching 4,882 incidents in 2024, a slight increase from 2023 and more than double the count of 2018. Within these disturbing statistics lies a stark reality: although Jewish Canadians comprise only about one per cent of our population, they have been the targets of roughly 68–70% of all religiously motivated hate crimes in recent data. In 2024 alone, 920 police-reported hate crimes were aimed at the Jewish community – making a Jewish Canadian approximately 25 times more likely to experience a hate crime than any other Canadian, as one community leader observed. These numbers shock the conscience. Antisemitic graffiti on our city streets, threats to synagogues and schools, and even the defacing of the National Holocaust Monument in Ottawa – each incident is not only an attack on Jewish Canadians, but a repudiation of Canadian values of diversity, respect, and human dignity. We cannot allow hatred of any kind to become normalized in this country. The fight against antisemitism is a fight for Canada's soul, and it demands urgent, collective action from all of us.

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Top officials and community leaders must lead by assertively condemning antisemitism and setting a tone of zero tolerance. From Parliament Hill to city halls, voices that influence public discourse need to make it unmistakably clear: hate has no place in Canada. Words matter. When leaders fail to swiftly and unequivocally denounce anti-Jewish incidents, it leaves room for prejudice to fester. A climate of responsible discourse, where no slur or threat goes unchallenged, will help drive bigotry back to the fringes, where it belongs.

Combating antisemitism starts in our classrooms and community centers. Education is our most powerful tool to inoculate young Canadians against hate. Provinces are beginning to act – for example, Ontario has made Holocaust education mandatory in schools (introducing lessons as early as Grade 6) and invested in teacher training on antisemitism. Manitoba will likewise require all Grade 10 students to learn about the Holocaust starting in 2025. These are encouraging steps that should be expanded Canada-wide. Teaching the history of Jewish Canadians, the horrors of the Holocaust, and the insidious nature of antisemitic myths will help foster empathy and historical awareness in the next generation. Alongside traditional education, we urgently need better digital and media literacy programs. Why? Because today's hatred often spreads online: extremist propaganda and disinformation flourish on social media, warping perceptions and inciting real-world harm.

By equipping students (and adults) to critically evaluate online content, recognize hateful propaganda, and refute dangerous conspiracy theories, we build resilience against manipulation. An informed public is less likely to be swayed by the falsehoods that fuel antisemitism.

Canada already has laws against hate propaganda, hate crimes, and violence – these laws must be vigorously enforced to deter would-be offenders. Law enforcement and the justice system should treat antisemitic threats, vandalism, and assaults with the utmost seriousness, prosecuting perpetrators to the full extent of the law. When hate-motivated crimes occur, swift justice is not only fair – it is essential for public trust.

Combatting antisemitism is not about policing opinions – it's about stopping harm: harassment, threats, violence, and the kind of dangerous rhetoric that incites them. We can – and must – enforce our laws against hate crime and hate speech while proudly protecting civil liberties. In fact, doing so is part of defending the open, democratic society that hatemongers seek to tear down. Justice and freedom go hand in hand: by punishing criminal hate acts, Canada affirms that no one's freedom extends to terrorizing their fellow citizens.

A truly effective fight against antisemitism also happens at the grassroots, in everyday spaces and neighborhoods. We all share responsibility for making our communities safe and inclusive. If you witness an anti-Jewish incident, report it and stand in solidarity with those affected. Schools, faith groups, and community organizations should join forces to hold unity events and interfaith dialogues. On a practical level, governments must ensure that synagogues, Jewish community centers, and schools are protected. In recent years, authorities have significantly increased funding to bolster security at vulnerable institutions.

In the digital age, the fight against antisemitism must extend to online spaces, where hatred too often finds fertile ground under the cover of anonymity. Social media platforms have become unwitting amplifiers of hate – and they must be part of the solution. Internet companies should be held accountable for monitoring and removing content that incites violence or spreads hateful propaganda. Online hate has real-world consequences – often a direct line can be drawn from toxic online ecosystems to harassment and violence on our streets. According to one recent audit, antisemitic incidents in Canada online skyrocketed by 161% between 2022 and 2024, as extremists exploited social media and even new technologies to spread hate. We must demand that tech companies enforce their own rules against hate speech, increase transparency, and swiftly shut down accounts trafficking in hate. Governments, for their part, should continue to develop balanced regulations that push platforms to act responsibly while safeguarding digital free expression. Ultimately, a healthier online environment – where antisemitism and other forms of hatred are marginalized – will translate into a safer society offline as well.

Canada must also increase immigration security to prevent foreign actors, hate mongers, and terrorist supporters from entering the country. Promoters of antisemitism, who traffic in false information about Israel‘s actions to defend itself after the heinous terrorist attacks of October 7, should be permanently barred from Canada. Individuals who may be even tangentially connected to terrorist groups or their funders should similarly be prevented from entering the country.

The resurgence of antisemitism challenges us to live up to the best of Canada’s ideals. This country’s identity is rooted in pluralism, where people of all faiths and backgrounds can thrive without fear. Combating antisemitism is not a task for the Jewish community alone, nor should it ever fall solely on the targets of hate to respond. It is a task for all Canadians.

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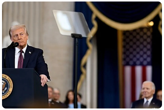

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