Never Again Rhetoric Fails to Prevent Anti-Semitism

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On the last night of Hanukkah (December 29), I awoke to several horrible and frightening headlines: "5 People Were Stabbed at a Hanukkah Celebration in a New York Suburb"; "100 Jewish Graves Were Desecrated in France--A Search for the Websites That Fueled the Hate Led to the US"; "Anti-Semitic Graffiti Sprayed Across London Shopfronts and Synagogue"; "NYPD Investigating 9th Anti-Semitic Attack Reported This Week"

These events are becoming more prevalent. New York’s Gov. Andrew Cuomo called the recent stabbings an act of “domestic terrorism.” Anti-Semitic attacks that have become more frequent, sinister and deadly are showing no signs of abating as the year closes.

Rabbi Jeffrey Myers, who was in the Tree of Life Synagogue in Squirrel Hill on Oct. 27, 2018 when a gunman opened fire killing 11 people, said the weekend attack in New York brought back terrible memories: “For me, it was a ‘oh no, not again’ sort of moment, combined with the flurry of anti-Semitic violence that you’ve heard has been taking place in New York over the past three weeks,” Rabbi Myers told CNN in an interview Monday. “It made me sort of wonder... I don’t recall them
selling licenses to have open hunting season on Jews. But it sure can make Jews feel that way.”

Other Jewish leaders report that members of their congregations are scared to the point that they now won’t wear a kippah (a skull cap used in public by Orthodox Jews) outside. Put bluntly, the prevalence of anti-Semitism calls for more than the usual hand wringing, expressions of sadness and repetition of slogans like “Never Again.” The fact is that it is and can happen again. These rhetorical responses alone are insufficient, providing only lip service to the quest to prevent anti-Semitism. Christians, Muslims, Blacks, Jews, Hispanics, Gays/Lesbians and others should share these stories, then loudly speaking out to curtail the increasing anti-Semitism and racism threatening our world.

While not the cause of the problem, we know that such hatred is emboldened by our President whose toxic discourse enables and gives permission for White Nationalists to come out of the shadows and act on their xenophobia.

Citizens of all races, religions and ethnicities must email government officials at all levels, demanding that President Trump be held accountable for his rhetoric. Actions must also be taken to discover the causes of this hatred and violence, and concrete plans, including education, be implemented to address those causes. After all, an attack on any one group is an attack on all potentially vulnerable groups.

With every day, our fear should accelerate. As Frida Ghitis, a former CNN producer and Washington Post contributor aptly put it: “Anti-Semitism is a symptom of a larger societal problem. Sure, when Jews are unsafe, it is they who are most at risk, but Jews are the canary in the coalmine, an early warning sign of a community or a nation losing its moorings. The coalmine is filling with toxic fumes.”
We must all be prepared to answer when our children and future generations ask, “What did you do in 2020 to stop such atrocious and venomous acts?”

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