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WJC blasts Hungarian far-right Jobbik Party and French anti-Semitism stats

BY LEAH WAXLER

World Jewish Congress has expressed concern that Hungary's opposition party members may join the far-right Jobbik Party.

President Ronald S. Lauder travelled to Hungary to assess the situation for himself and was shocked to discover truth to the notion.

Jobbik rose to prominence openly employing anti-Semitic, racist and xenophobic rhetoric and ideology.

Party members and leaders have repeatedly made anti-Semitic statements and actions.

Jobbik has attempted to distance itself from this stance but Lauder is not convinced about their actions.

"Despite recent rebranding attempts, Jobbik has not done nearly enough in terms of concrete actions to distance itself from its anti-Semitic roots, or to stem the continued flow of anti-Semitism and racism still reportedly emanating from local Jobbik cells," he said.

"Jobbik must do far more to credibly demonstrate that it opposes anti-Semitism and racism, and to prove by way of its actions that it does not pose a threat to the security and well-being of the Jewish community and other minority groups in Hungary.

"As long as extremism reigns within this party, Jobbik must be designated by its peers in the Hungarian parliament, as well as by the international community, as an outcast not worthy of alliance. Until these changes come about, it is dangerous for any Hungarian political party to do business with the extremist Jobbik party or to allow Jobbik into the mainstream of Hungarian politics."

The concern surrounding Jobbik and anti-Semitism in Hungary was evident last Saturday when a neo-Nazi march took place in Budapest.

The Conference of European Rabbis unites



Jobbik supporters in Hungary





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over 700 religious leaders across mainstream synagogue communities.

The organisation has become a voice of Judaism to defend the religious rights of Jews across Europe.

"The images of neo-Nazis marching through the streets of Budapest are a painful reminder of Europe's darkest chapter and remind us that anti-Semitism doesn't happen in a vacuum and as in the past, dangers can manifest if hateful rhetoric is left unchallenged," said Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, President, Conference of European Rabbis.

"Such acts are an attack on Europe and its inherent values of respect for human dignity, human rights, freedom and equality."

He added, "The indifference of the Hungarian authorities perturbs me at a time of concern to a large proportion of European Jews, following the rise in anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial across the continent and the political spectrum.

"As resentment, hatred and misinformation spread more and more, so does the danger that anti-Semitism will turn into deadly terror, as the attack on the synagogue in Pittsburgh has shown.

"We need authorities to stand up for pluralism and lead the fight against anti-Semitism and its hateful spread in Europe. Jews should be able to live everywhere in the world without fear."

Only last week, Board of Deputies President Marie van der Zyl raised various issues to Hungarian Secretary of State Vince Szalay-Bobrovniczky at a meeting.

Long standing concerns included the use of anti-Semitic tropes, remarks directed at Muslims and migrants, the role of historical Hungarian leaders in supporting the Holocaust, closure threats of the Aurora Jewish Community Centre and relations between the Hungarian Government and Federation of Jewish Communities.

Ms Van der Zyl also noted a clear test of governmental goodwill was whether a proposed Holocaust museum commanded support of the mainstream Hungarian

Jewish community, including Federation of the Hungarian Jewish Communities and Holocaust research institutes such as Yad Vashem.

WJC, meantime, backed BoD comments following the Community Security Trust report on record high anti-Semitism figures for the third year in a row in the United Kingdom.

"Over the last few years, we have seen an extreme conflation of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, among both average citizens and political figures, particularly within the Labour Party," said Lauder in response to the findings. "British Jews still live in relative peace and harmony, and we must do everything we can to make sure that continues."

He added, "The UK was the first country to formally adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of anti-Semitism, an encouraging and positive move for which we are most grateful. The next step must be to ensure that the definition is adopted systematically and across the board, to yield as an effective tool for law enforcement. Adopt, encode and enforce. This will allow anti-Semitism to be confronted appropriately and comprehensively."

Ms van der Zyl on this issue noted, "Events in Gaza and the ongoing anti-Semitism crisis in the Labour Party undoubtedly played a role in these figures and they are very worrying for Jews living in the UK.

"This report shows there is no room for complacency. Defeating the evil of anti-Semitism will take a concerted effort by the country's political leadership, in all parties - and civil society.

"We must strive to make our country a just, safe and respectful society. There can be no room for racism and hatred."

Across the Channel in France, Lauder called for action in response to Interior Minister Christophe Castaner's announcing anti-Semitic acts rose by 74% in 2018.

Lauder described the government figures as "alarming and unacceptable".

Castaner reported the startling statistic after a tree planted in memory of a Jewish man, Ilan Halimi, who was tortured before being murdered in 2006, was chopped down, as discovered by municipal workers when visiting the site for a remembrance ceremony.

Other anti-Semitic incidents in recent days included swastikas appearing on Paris post boxes and the word 'Juden' sprayed on the window of a bagel bakery.

"The numbers speak for themselves," said Lauder.

"Enough is enough, we hope the French government will not only condemn these atrocious acts, but go after the perpetrators, for the sake not only of the country's Jewish community, but for the health of French society as a whole.

"We cannot afford to relive our past, the only way we will stop this hate is to educate the next generation about the crimes that took place over the last 74 years."

