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Global support from Jewish leaders following Notre Dame blaze

BY LEAH WAXLER

Jewish leaders and organisations stood in solidarity with the people of France following a fire that engulfed the 850-year-old Notre Dame Cathedral following a horrific 15-hour blaze that hit the news on Monday night.

Hundreds of firefighters battled the fire as it destroyed the building's roof and caused the spire to collapse. Their efforts ensured the main stone structure, including its two towers, was not destroyed.

The cause of the fire is not yet clear.

Valuable artwork and religious items stored inside the cathedral were saved.

"We had a chain of solidarity, especially in saving the works of art," said Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo. "This is a tragedy for the whole world. Notre-Dame is the entire history of Paris."

French president Emmanuel Macron vowed to rebuild the iconic symbol of Paris at the scene on Monday night.

"We'll rebuild this cathedral all together and it's undoubtedly part of the French destiny and the project we'll have for the coming years," said Macron. "That's what the French expect and because it's what our history deserves."

He added, "The worse has been avoided,



Notre Dame Cathedral engulfed in flames

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

although the battle is not yet totally won.

"Notre Dame of Paris is our history, our literature, our imagination. The place where we survived epidemics, wars, liberation. It has been the epicenter of our lives."

Macron's appeal was quickly taken up as

hundreds of millions of euros were pledged to rebuild the French cathedral including €100m from Billionaire François-Henri Pinault, €200m by Bernard Arnault's family and €100m Total oil.

In Israel, President Reuven Rivlin took to social media in offering his country's reaction alongside World Jewish Congress on behalf of its many affiliated countries.

"Our hearts are with the people of France and legends of Notre Dame Paris, real and fictional, and we pray it will stand in eternity," he said.

"WJC and our affiliated communities in more than 100 countries stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the people of France and the Catholic Church in the face of the unimaginable devastation of the Notre Dame Cathedral, a blow that has struck straight to the heart of Paris," WJC President Ronald Lauder said.

"Notre Dame has for centuries stood proud and tall as an inimitable icon, a symbol of the country's great culture and history.

"We pray that there are no injuries or loss of life in this tragedy, and that the destruction can be restored to allow this unparalleled structure to return to its position of symbolic majesty on the Parisian skyline."

Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, President of the Conference of European Rabbis, noted, "Notre-Dame of Paris is a symbol of

human ingenuity and endurance, celebrating almost one thousand years of European and French culture, architecture and freedom. Places of worship are a bridge between our past and future, symbolising the aspiration of man to reach new heights and spirituality.

"We express our solidarity with France and especially with its Catholic community following this devastating incident and wish them strength and hope."

Francis Kalifat, President of CRIF for French Jewish organisations tweeted: "Our solidarity and thoughts go to France's Catholic community. Immense sadness as we face this tragedy which this nation is mourning."

US President Trump tweeted: "So horrible to watch the massive fire at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris."

In the UK, Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis commented, "The horrifying Notre Dame Cathedral Fire may have caused untold physical damage but these Parisians are proof that there is no force in the world that can destroy the human spirit. Our thoughts are with all those devastated by this tragedy."

And Board of Deputies in a statement added, "Our thoughts with Parisians and all of France.

"The devastation of any place of worship is a tragedy, particularly Notre Dame which holds a special place in the hearts of so many, especially Catholics."

Built in the 12th and 13th centuries, Notre Dame is the most famous Gothic cathedral.

Around 13 million people visit it every year.

