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Jewish groups slam Belgian authorities after 'antisemitic' carnival goes ahead

Criticism from around the world met with defiance in Aalst whose mayor defends 'satirical' use of anti-Jewish tropes in procession

By **JEWISH NEWS REPORTER**
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Aalst mayor Christoph D'Haese (R) and a Jewish caricature pictured during the yearly carnival parade in the streets of Aalst, Sunday 23 February 2020, starting on Sunday with the so-called Zondagsstoet. BELGA PHOTO NICOLAS MAETERLINCK

A satirical Belgian carnival which had its UNESCO cultural heritage listing withdrawn last year for its use of antisemitic caricatures of Jews went ahead on Sunday despite global protests from Jewish groups and Israeli ministers.





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The annual procession through the Flemish city of Aalst, in which Jews were reportedly depicted as ants, led to opprobrium from across Europe, with American Jewish groups also horrified.

Last year puppets of giant hook-nosed Jews caused outrage, depicting “scheming Jews” as rats and bags of money at their feet.

Ahead of this week’s march, organisers reportedly sold hundreds of “rabbi kits” with over-sized strap-on noses, mock side locks and black hats.

“Public displays of anti-Jewish hatred should have long been tossed on the ash heap of history,” said Daniel Schwammenthal, director of the American Jewish Committee’s Brussels-based Transatlantic Institute.

“It is incomprehensible that 75 years after the liberation of Auschwitz, such vile displays of antisemitism are allowed to happen in the heart of Europe. Belgian authorities ought to urgently prevent the organisers from displaying the anti-Jewish floats and inciting to hatred in any way.”

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz urged Belgium to “condemn and ban this hateful parade in Aalst,” adding: “Belgium as a western democracy should be ashamed to allow such a vitriolic antisemitic display”.

Emmanuel Nahshon, Israel’s ambassador to Belgium, later said Katz was “absolutely not [asking for] the prohibition of carnival... What we are asking for is the prohibition of all these antisemitic cartoons, which [go] beyond good taste”.





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This week Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt of the Conference of European Rabbis said it represented an “abuse of free speech” to peddle antisemitic tropes.

“This type of antisemitism is a reminder of some of the darker moments of Europe’s past,” he said.

“We cannot pretend that these images are some kind of joke, or that they do not cause fear. It is not acceptable for world leaders to declare ‘never again’ then sit idly by when these symbols appear on their streets just weeks later.”

However the mayor of Aalst said the carnival had suffered “grotesque accusations” and reaffirmed that the city was “the capital of mockery and satire”. Belgian Prime Minister Sophie Wilmes said it was an “internal affair”.

<https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/jewish-groups-slam-belgian-authorities-after-antisemitic-carnival-goes-ahead/>

