



Submissions of
ONE FREE WORLD INTERNATIONAL

Prepared for the
PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN CANADA

CANADIAN PARLIAMENTARY COALITION TO COMBAT ANTISEMITISM

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I. Introduction

Antisemitism is an abhorrent attitude that has led to untold suffering throughout the ages. It dehumanizes the Jewish people thus justifying discrimination, exploitation, abuse, and even murder. Its inevitable end is attempted destruction of the Jewish people as in the Nazi Holocaust.

While we would like to believe that antisemitism is only a historical issue and no longer relevant, it is on the increase in Canada and worldwide. It continues to surface in traditional ways with open verbal, symbolic, or physical attacks against Jewish individuals or symbols. On the other hand, a new, contemporary antisemitism couches itself in the cloak of anti-zionism, spun as “legitimate” criticism of the State of Israel.

The frame of reference for this Parliamentary Inquiry relates to antisemitism in Canada. However, antisemitism in Canada today cannot be viewed in isolation from its broader historical and international context or from its relationship to the treatment of other religious minorities around the world. Since most contributors to this Inquiry are expected to focus on Canada, the present submissions will focus on the broader view, relating it to the Canadian context. More information about the incidents mentioned herein can be obtained by contacting OFWI.

II. About One Free World International (OFWI)

Reverend Majed El Shafie, President and Founder of OFWI, was born in Egypt to a prominent Muslim family of judges and lawyers. He was detained and severely tortured by Egyptian authorities after he converted to Christianity and began advocating equal rights for Egyptian Christians. Sentenced to death, he fled Egypt by way of Israel and settled in Canada in 2002, establishing OFWI to share a message of freedom, hope, and tolerance for religious differences and to promote human rights in this area through advocacy and public education.

Rev. El Shafie has testified twice before the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development and has provided expert reports or expert testimony in numerous refugee proceedings in Canada and the United States.

OFWI supports religious freedom without regard to the victims' religion or creed. Accordingly, it also stands against antisemitism and has organized several inter-faith events in cooperation with B'nai Brith Canada. It has an extensive network of local sources in Muslim and communist countries and cooperates with other human rights observers and organizations. More information is available on the OFWI website at www.onefreeworldinternational.org.

III. Antisemitism: History

The history of antisemitism and its culmination in the horrors of the Holocaust are well-known. Yet we must not take such knowledge for granted, but must continue to tell the story in order to educate new generations and so we would not forget or become complacent.

From the exile of the Jews by the Romans after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem to the Spanish Inquisition and from the pogroms of Russia to the Edicts of Expulsion (Spain and England, among others) and finally to the horrors of the Nazi gas chambers, Jews have been harassed, discriminated, oppressed, persecuted, and killed, simply because they were Jews. The sixty-odd years since the end of the Second World War and the establishment of the State of Israel have provided the Jewish people with a rare moment of reprieve from the constant onslaught of antisemitism. Yet even that precarious respite has begun to show distinct signs of running out, especially over the last decade.

Canada is not free from the stain of antisemitism despite our history of openness, tolerance, and welcoming immigration. Historically we must acknowledge, for example, a strong climate of antisemitism in the period before and into the Second World War. Canada's immigration policy was extremely restrictive toward Jewish immigrants and refugees. Even in 1939 when the nature of Nazi policies was already apparent, Canada sent over 900 Jewish refugees on the St. Louis ship back to Europe where many perished in Nazi death camps.

As the full horrors of the Holocaust were revealed in the aftermath of the Second World War, entire generations were traumatized by the evidence of human capacity for evil against their fellow human beings and swore, "Never again".

IV. Antisemitism: Contemporary Manifestations and Nature

While there are no Nazi death camps today, traditional antisemitism persists. Fascism of the 20th century has given way to a self-righteous, nefarious antisemitism from the left of the political spectrum which shares the field with various forms of neo-fascist ideology on the extreme right. Manifestations include attacks on Jewish individuals, businesses, synagogues, schools, and other identifiable Jewish targets. In Europe Jewish cemeteries are defaced and in Paris a young Jewish man was kidnapped and brutally tortured for 24 days before being killed in unimaginable horror by 23 people with the indirect involvement or wilful blindness of dozens of others. Closer to home, synagogues and schools have been vandalized or firebombed from Montreal and Quebec City to Kelowna, while university students conceal their Jewish identity to avoid harassment and intimidation on campus amid hostile protests and “academic” conferences that are little more than anti-Israel propaganda sessions.

Contemporary antisemitism typically masquerades as anti-zionism. Various examples include for example op-eds and editorials harshly critical of Israel; comparisons between Israeli policies and apartheid or Nazi Germany; biased and even falsified news reporting in such unexpected places as Sweden, with the support of the government moreover; Israeli athletes and sports teams excluded from sporting events or welcomed with Nazi greetings; vicious anti-Israel demonstrations; and calls for boycotts. In Canada, only a few weeks ago the United Church of Canada rejected a resolution mandating a concerted boycott of Israel, but passed one encouraging individual groups and churches to examine the issue and take appropriate measures.

There is no question that Israel can and should be evaluated and critiqued on its policies just like any other state as long as such criticism is based on facts and truth. Anti-zionism, however, goes beyond legitimate criticism and transfers antisemitic thought patterns from the people to the state. Where it is morally reprehensible to question the right of Jews to exist as individuals and as a people, questioning the legitimacy of the State of Israel or its right to defend itself seems superficially acceptable and does not attract the same censure. Yet the same antisemitic logic operates as is plainly obvious if one tries to apply the same critiques to other states. Consequently, antisemitism in this paper is understood to include anti-zionism.

The rise of contemporary antisemitism is of particular concern because of its ready acceptance in academia, the media, and among the political classes in many countries and the influence these have on the mainstream. Antisemitism in academia benefits from the air of legitimacy associated with scholarship and leaves an indelible impact on future generations of decision-makers causing damage far beyond proportion. In the news media antisemitism directly influences the “man-in-the-street”. Yet media “objectivity” has somehow come to mean, not the dispassionate reporting of facts, but presenting a balance between competing positions, regardless of their relative merits or moral strengths. This has resulted in imputing moral equivalence to Israel’s actions of self-defence and those of terrorists attacking innocent Israelis, which can only be described as bias. Finally, antisemitism in political classes leads to antisemitism in the community being downplayed, anti-Israel slugs like the Durban conference on racism, and blatantly one-sided resolutions at the United Nations.

Another concern is the increasingly public nature of antisemitic acts and the recurrent theme of onlookers doing nothing to protect victims. To the extent that the general public is indifferent or condones antisemitic actions even after decades of public education campaigns about human rights and the horrors to which antisemitism can lead, the future is bleak indeed.

V. Antisemitism and Other Religious Minorities

While the effect of antisemitism on Jews as fellow human beings is sufficient reason to be concerned, it is not the only reason. Despite increases in antisemitism, historically speaking Jews still live and worship relatively freely in the West and have some safety in the protection of the State of Israel. On the other hand, human nature has not changed, as evidenced in the genocide of Rwanda in the 1990s. In the 21st century, black African Muslims in Darfur are brutalized by their Arab Muslim countrymen, converts from Islam are pursued by the death penalty across the Muslim world, and any Christians discovered in North Korea and unregistered church leaders in China are imprisoned, put to forced labour, and often tortured, particularly in the former.

These are only a minuscule sampling of events taking place today around the world, or even in the countries mentioned. But what do they have to do with antisemitism in Canada? Nothing on the surface, and yet everything. Because where human beings think little or nothing of

oppressing their fellow human beings, whether because of the colour of their skin or their religious beliefs or rites, the identity of the victim matters little. In fact, the only reason we do not hear of Jews persecuted in many of these countries despite rampant antisemitism is that any Jewish community that may once have existed is now either virtually or actually non-existent. The following examples demonstrate how antisemitism and persecution of other religious minorities coexist.

Despite a peace agreement with Israel committing it to abstain from hostile propaganda or incitement, Egypt's state-run media are full of grossly antisemitic and anti-Israel political cartoons, editorials, and television programs; school textbooks omit Israel on maps and declare that Israel remains the enemy and that war can break at any moment; and authorities close their eyes to terrorists smuggling weapons to Gaza. At the same time, Christians, Bahá'ís and others are discriminated and fear forcible conversion, imprisonment, and possible torture, while converts are often tortured or killed even by their own family-members.

The President of Iran rants against Israel threatening its destruction, pursues nuclear weapons, and Iranian Jews, and often Bahá'ís, are charged with spying for Israel. Meanwhile Iranian Christians and Bahá'ís are frequently arrested and held without charge, and converts are tortured to extract the names of other converts or information about house churches.

In Pakistan, despite the absence of any apparent Jewish community, antisemitism and anti-zionism are widespread. In the meantime, impoverished Christians are lured into enslavement in this country where a two-year old Christian girl can be raped because her father refuses to convert to Islam. Christians, Hindus, and others are killed arbitrarily with vague and draconian Blasphemy Laws serving as pretext, and Ahmadis, considered heretics, are prohibited under threat of criminal sanction by anti-Ahmadi laws from presenting themselves as Muslims or publicly observing rites.

Saudi Arabia officially prohibits entry to Israelis or those with Israeli stamps in their passports and unofficially bans Jews. In 2005 a teacher who had spoken positively about Jews and the Bible was sentenced to almost three and a half years in penitentiary and 750 lashes before OFWI intervention led to his release. At the same time, the Muslim Shi'a minority faces discrimination, all public non-Muslim religious practice is forbidden and religious police

periodically raid even the private religious gatherings of foreigners imprisoning participants and confiscating Bibles.

Problems with “media objectivity” apply here as much as to antisemitism. For example, in a recent Canadian news report, an American-born girl who fled home claiming her father had threatened to kill her for converting from Islam to Christianity was characterized as a normal rebellious teenager afraid of “punishment”, omitting any mention of death threats. Such attitudes and reporting make any resolution of the human rights issues involved impossible as the first victim of this false objectivity is the truth. However, the real victims of such distortion are Jews and others whose religious beliefs make them a target.

Just like in Nazi Germany, wherever antisemitism flourishes other religious or ethnic minorities, the disabled, homosexuals, and others eventually face persecution, and other basic human rights, such as women’s rights, freedom of expression, etc., are or soon will be threatened. If left unchecked such attitudes and oppression will spread like poison and affect Jews and other minorities alike worldwide. Even if they do not result in wide-scale antisemitism or anti-religious behaviours in Canada, the potential for a cataclysmic and costly world war to protect our freedoms is very real and the results not a foregone conclusion. As a result, it is our responsibility to speak out, to come to the aid of victims, and to ensure that such attitudes are not permitted to flourish in Canada or anywhere else in the world.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

History teaches us that if we do not remember and learn from our history we are destined to repeat our mistakes. There is perhaps no lesson more important than that of antisemitism, the Holocaust, and genocide, yet we do not seem to learn this lesson. The Rwandan genocide, the greatest example of an entirely avoidable evil since the Holocaust, took place despite clear warning signs that the world simply chose to ignore. In the meantime, antisemitism simmers.

If the rise of antisemitism is permitted to go unchecked, the result will be another holocaust more destructive, more barbaric, and more unthinkable than that unleashed by the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s. The spirit of hatred and intolerance will not rest with the destruction of the Jewish state and elimination of all Jews, but will endanger all freedom-loving peoples.

We have plenty of laws in place to protect individuals and property from generic and antisemitic crimes. We do not need more laws or regulations. We need the political will to enforce those laws that already exist. We need leaders in and out of government with the moral strength to speak truth boldly, loudly, and clearly to those, individuals, governments, or media, who would hide behind false notions of political correctness, self-righteous politics whether of the extreme right or left, or the false cover of a disingenuous concept of anti-zionism. We must also encourage other governments to do the same, for example showing the Swedish government that it is possible to support freedom of the press while still condemning vile content. Finally, we must not be afraid to clearly state the connection where it exists between incidents such as the Paris torture case and extremist Islamic teachings.

If we do not speak out on behalf of the Jewish people and against antisemitism today, who will speak out tomorrow for the Christians, or Bahá'ís, Uyghur or Darfur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, or Ahmadis, to mention only a few? Antisemitism is everyone's issue and we must not be silent.