



Official remarks by Ronald S. Lauder, President of World Jewish Congress, A Celebration of Jewish Life in Sweden October 12, 2021

Thank you. It is my great pleasure to speak to you today in this historic synagogue on a topic that is so important and widely recognized: By the Jewish community of Malmo, the Jewish citizens of Sweden, And by the Jewish people around the world.

That topic, of course, is antisemitism, the hatred of people because they are Jewish. We all know this hatred has followed the Jewish people for over 2,000 years.

It has burned our homes and synagogues.

It has beaten our parents in the streets.

It has slaughtered our children.

Just after World War II, when the entire world saw the photographs of Auschwitz, Dachau and Treblinka, we thought antisemitism would disappear. No one in their right mind wanted to be associated with Nazis. But today, 76 years later and 3 generations later, people have forgotten, or they were never taught about it.



So here we are, in the 3rd decade of the 21st century and antisemitism has not gone away. It has increased throughout the world, making this conference more relevant than ever. With that in mind, I first want to thank the government of Sweden, which helped make the Malmo Forum possible. Most of all, I want to thank my friend and an outstanding statesman, Prime Minister Stefan Lofven. Thank you Prime Minister.

I think during my time as President of the World Jewish Congress, I have met almost every Prime Minister and President and I'll tell you there is no one like him. And we are lucky.

Can one man make a difference? We have witnessed a huge change in Sweden since Prime Minister Lofven took office:

A change in greater safety for the Swedish Jewish community.

A change in Holocaust education for the next generation.

The opening of the local museum on the Holocaust, which we hope all school children will visit.

And a positive and even-handed change in Sweden's foreign policy towards the Jewish State of Israel.

I can tell you that the Jewish people are so grateful for all of these changes. Mr. Prime Minister, from the bottom of my heart I thank you everything you are doing to fight antisemitism, are an inspiration to other world leaders and for being a true friend of the Jewish people.



There is one more name that we should ever forget. Few people had the courage to stand up to the Nazi hatred of Jews, in fact, many Europeans went along with it.

But one man stood out, a Swedish diplomat named Raoul Wallenberg.

The name Wallenberg should be remembered always and children everywhere should be taught what this one man did. Raoul Wallenberg showed the world how human beings should react in the face of hatred and intolerance. Wallenberg was supported by the Swedish section of the World Jewish Congress. I proudly reopened this section of the World Jewish Congress last year, working closely with the Swedish Jewish community.

We will also never forget how Sweden took in survivors from the camps after the war. Sweden helped bring these people back to life. In our audience today, right here in the first row are five survivors of the camps who live here in Sweden. We will never forget your sacrifice and your courage. As President of the World Jewish Congress, on behalf of the Jewish people, I thank people of Sweden for all you have done over the years. I thank you.

The title of this conference is long: The Malmo Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Anti-Semitism. So, allow me to say what needs to be said in simple and clear words. Forgive me if I sound too direct, but I sense that I am here among friends.

I have been dealing with antisemitism since I became involved in the Jewish world. That's most of my adult life. I've witnessed it. I've met too many victims of antisemitism. I've also been the target of it, myself. And I



have seen people lose their lives – not from disease or accidents – but because they happened to be Jewish.

Think about that for a moment. People losing their lives because of the religion they practice. Will that ever make any rational sense? We read the same bible. We follow the same commandments. Using pure logic, antisemitism makes no sense. Zero. But antisemites and antisemitism is not based in logic. It's based in fear, lies and ignorance.

And we make a big mistake if we think the hatred of Jews is something from the past. Listen to these figures from a recent PEW Research study

Remember, Jews make up Zero-Point-2 Percent of the world's population. That is a tiny number. We are not even 1 percent, 15 million Jews, set against 2.3 billion Christians, 1.9 billion Muslims and many, many more. Yet, Jews are the targets of over 50 percent of all religious crimes. These are not just isolated attacks they have occurred in 88 countries. This isn't from 1941, this is happening today.

Today's hatred of Jews comes from two distinct groups. There are the neo-Nazis and ultra-nationalists on the right, but their numbers have not increased. The growing hatred of Jews is now coming from political left, and it is gaining many more followers. And this new hatred hides behind an obsession of the Jewish State of Israel.

I have a real question for everyone in this room: What would you think if Sweden was attacked today, by 4,000 rockets aimed at Malmo, or Goteborg, or Stockholm?



And what if they were launched by terrorists who make no effort to hide their ultimate goal of the destruction of Sweden and their desire to kill all Swedish people?

While you are thinking about that, because that is exactly what Hamas did, and what it believes.

Here is one more question: How would you feel if it was Sweden that was criticized in the world media and on the internet for defending itself?

If it was Sweden that was condemned in the United Nations for doing what any other country would do to defend its citizens?

These questions seem absurd because you know what Sweden or any other country would do to defend its citizens. So then, why is it that only Israel receives the world's condemnation.

This demonization of the world's only Jewish state must stop.

It must stop in the media and internet, where small numbers of people filled with hatred can post their thoughts for all to see on Instagram and Facebook and many other sites.

Here's how lies are rejected in 2021. They start on the internet and social media, then these lies are reported in mainstream media. They are not the truth. What are we talking about?

Today, social media projected by mainstream media equals a distorted reality. Holocaust denial is a perfect example.



What they do to Israel they can do to anyone. Remember Hitler went after the Jews first. But when it was all over, 60 million people on two continents were destroyed. Jews have always been the canary on the coal mine. When Jews are in danger, eventually everyone is in danger.

These attacks on Israel must stop on college campuses. It must stop in the United Nations. We all know that the U.N. has an obsession with Israel, but it continues because practically every other country is silent.

Where does this silence come from?

Why won't decent governments stand up and say "enough" to this one-sided obsession.

Listen to these numbers:

Last year, the U.N. General Assembly voted to condemn countries 23 times. 17 times for Israel – the only democracy in the Middle East, and 6 times for the entire rest of the world. These numbers make the United Nations look unserious and they demean the entire institution. Mr. Prime Minister, we hope Sweden takes an active role in the effort to bring the U.N. back to its senses.

Some of the crimes against Jews have taken place right here in Malmö. And they have occurred because a group, from countries in the Middle East, have come here on the good graces of the Swedish people.

But instead of taking advantage of the benefits of a liberal democracy, they brought their old hatreds with them.



This has caused problems for Sweden. But for my people, the problems have been even worse. And this is something that cannot go unsaid.

If I have learned one thing, it is this: antisemites are cowards. They are bullies. And when they are confronted, they back away and hide. At the same time when there is no reaction to their hate they are emboldened. Silence gives them strength.

So, when a Foreign Minister or a mayor ...

Or someone on the street ...

Or at a dinner party tells a lie about Jewish people ...

And there is no reaction, antisemites get stronger

In the end, this up to all of us.

It is up to everyone in this room.

You have to say something!

You cannot be indifferent!

My greatest role as president of the World Jewish Congress has been to fight back.

To tell people that we cannot allow this growing group of people continue this hate.



There are concrete ways this can be done. First and most important is education. All school children must learn about the Holocaust, understand where it comes about, and understand where hatred ultimately leads.

I want schools around the world to set aside one day – January 27th, the day Auschwitz was liberated, as Holocaust Awareness Day. I want every classroom in every city throughout the world to designate this one day – to teach children, what happened, why it happened and how to prevent this from ever happening to any people again.

At the same time, I am aware that a just and reasonable settlement must be found with the Palestinian people. I have pursued a two-state solution for years and I have never given up on this idea. Two states for two people is the only way that this long conflict can finally come to a just conclusion. What we need – most of all – are courageous leaders on both sides to take the first step, to make their people understand the importance of compromise to achieve this.

As president of the World Jewish Congress, I will continue my efforts. I will continue to talk to both sides. I must tell you I spent time in Ramallah, and they want peace with Israel, as much as anybody. And it can be done. I will help in whatever way I can.

I am not naïve, I realize the hatred of Jews has been with us for 2,000 years and will never completely go away. But we can do everything in our power to keep this virus from spreading. We applaud the Swedish Prime Minister and the government for taking the first steps. you have set an example, for all world leaders. It is extraordinary important that the fight



against antisemitism and all hatred comes from the top of the government. All world leaders should do what you have done. And I thank you for your help with the Jewish community here in protecting its synagogues, its school and its people. But my hope, my vision for Sweden's Jews is not needing special protection anymore. And to be free to live without fear like there was sixty years ago. I wish all countries could be as considerate on these issues as Sweden.

I wish all countries would be as considerate on these topics as Sweden. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart. We have so much more to do, but knowing we have a willing partner in Sweden gives us strength. You are a good people. And a sometimes dark world can look to Sweden and see a strong, clear light that will guide us on the right path. I thank you. And may God bless the Swedish people.

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