



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10007

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** October 18, 2015

**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT ANNUAL  
CONFERENCE OF MAYORS**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Thank you so much, Jeff.

Shalom. Thank you, everyone, for being here in this truly sacred place, where our hearts are moved. I am grateful to have the privilege of addressing you, and it's humbling – it's humbling to be here.

I want to thank Jack Rosen, President of the American Jewish Congress, for all he does, but I also want to thank him as a survivor's son – for turning all this pain into something positive in the way he provides leadership. And I want to thank Alex Levin, President of the World Forum on Russian Jewry, for his support and leadership as well.

And all my fellow mayors who are here, thank you for standing in solidarity with Israel. Thank you for seeing firsthand the challenges that people are facing, and bringing home to your nations the truth about the reality here.

I'm also so thankful to so many community leaders from New York City who joined us. Thank you for your support and friendship. And thank you to the Consul General of Israeli Government in New York, Ido Aharoni, for your constant partnership.

The – the irony, the challenge when you come to this holy land, this beautiful land – when you look out over this bright blue vista and see so much good – and yet we're here at a painful moment. We're here at a moment where people are afraid, where people are struggling because of the violence in their midst – every single day lately, more and more terrorist attacks on absolutely innocent civilians – something unconscionable and unacceptable according to all our values, and something that must end.

Last night, with the Mayor of Jerusalem, I had the honor of visiting Hadassah Hospital. And my friends, that noble institution sadly is the first, in so many cases, to respond to these terror attacks – to try and save people, day after day, who were just minding their own business and going about their lives – suddenly found themselves victims of terror.

And I expected to visit and feel the pains of the victims and their families – something all mayors are familiar with, because in our work, we are ministers in our own sense. We attend to the needs of families in pain.

And certainly there was pain, and there was agony, but there was also something positive – because that great hospital is serving people in their time of need; because that hospital includes people of all backgrounds; because the families and even the victims talked about their hopes, even after what they had been through.

So, on a day when we can't help but feel the weight of this crisis, there is always hope. And we remember, and – all mayors work every day at creating inclusion, and acceptance, and tolerance, and we remember that that's always the way forward. This place reminds us – Yad Vashem reminds us, the answer to hatred is inclusion, is tolerance.

We work for it every day in my city. I love my city – it is one of the most diverse and complicated in all the world, but we work every day at making a more perfect union out of all our beloved diversity.

This is my fourth trip to Israel – I'm very proud to say, my first as mayor of New York City. It's my fourth trip to Yad Vashem. Every time I come here, I can feel a change happening in my consciousness, in my understanding. Every time I come here, I feel enriched, and I feel my soul open up, because so much has happened in this land, and it causes reflection, it causes us to rededicate ourselves. Certainly, when you come to Yad Vashem, it's natural to feel sorrow and it's certainly natural to feel anger, but it causes, at the same time, a deep desire to rededicate yourself to the fight for justice and fairness.

We have in New York City the largest Jewish population of any city on Earth – something I'm very proud of. And it's something that provides me with a sense of responsibility to protect the community that sadly has known not just tens of years or centuries of oppression, but millennia – the community that so often is under attack by surrounding society, and, too often it its history, under attack by the governments of the very places that the community resided. That is the painful history.

In New York City, we are proud of our Jewish community. It is one of the quintessential communities of New York City. There's a deep, deep bond between our city and the land of Israel. It is powerful – it's palpable. People of all walks of life and backgrounds can feel it and feel solidarity with the Jewish people and the people of Israel, and that's a blessing.

Here, we see a time that reminds us that the threats that the Jewish people have experienced through generations continue. It seems, in one way, the world hasn't evolved enough. Being here at Yad Vashem – it's a reminder of the work we have to do. And the history grabs at it, it seizes us, it wakes us up – and that's what it's meant to do.

This place tells a story of so many who did not live to speak for themselves. It gives voice to those who are lost. And it reminds us that something unimaginable was all too real.

There's an exhibit here that I was powerfully moved by. And it wasn't one of the most searing, or the most dramatic – in fact, I was moved by it because it was so pedestrian, it was so mundane.

There's a streetlamp from the Warsaw ghetto, and cobblestones around it. And you can stand by that streetlamp and feel, just for a moment, as if you're some point in the 1930s in a large city in Europe, and life is going on as normal, and, just over the horizon, is a horror unimaginable.

And it reminds us of our responsibility, because there was a time to stop the horror – there was a chance to stop the horror. The fact is, in everyday life, that we are reminded of our responsibilities to others.

That street lamp illuminated everyday life, normal life and then, at one point, it illuminated the dehumanization of a people, and the oppression of a people, and the murder of a people. It tells a story of what happens when hatred goes unchecked, and when indifference is the attitude of good people.

Yad Vashem reminds us that before this horror, there were not just years – there were decades of warning, and decades of inaction. In the 1920s and the 1930s, even into the 1940s, people we consider decent and civilized looked the other way in countries all over Europe. And nations that could have intervened – that could have addressed the crisis – choose not to. It's a reminder that you can never ignore the warning signs.

16 years ago, Elie Wiesel spoke at the White House, and he spoke about the danger of indifference. He said, “For the person who is indifferent, his or her neighbor are of no consequence. And therefore, their lives are meaningless. [...] Indifference reduces the other to an abstraction.” We are again confronting a time when we can’t allow the struggles of our fellow human beings to be seen as an abstraction. The forces of hatred that strangled Western Europe decades ago have not been eradicated.

We wanted to believe that the phenomenon of anti-Semitism wouldn’t have to be addressed again in some of our nations, but we have to look squarely at the reality we face today – that the cancer of anti-Semitism has grown again in Europe. And I hasten to add it’s not just a European problem. We in New York City see bias incidents that we fight against regularly. We in the United States have seen horrible acts of violence, including the murder of two innocent people at a Jewish community center in Kansas last year. We are not perfect ourselves, but something is happening in Europe that is distinct and sadly reminiscent of some of what we saw in the past.

Anti-Semitism is not new in Europe. There may be imported elements, but in its first instance, it is the anti-Semitism that never went away – that lingered in too many communities and too much of the social discourse, and in too many of the governing assumptions of these societies.

This anti-Semitism found – can be found in the substantial support that Western European people gave to xenophobic parties, anti-immigrant parties in the 2014 European parliament elections. This anti-Semitism can be seen in the desecration of cemeteries in France, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, and Germany. Let’s be clear – some of the attackers are Muslim, some of the attackers are Christian, some of the attackers have no faith. That reminds us that it’s not any one religion that is the enemy. The enemy is hatred itself.

Our United States Secretary of State John Kerry released the Annual Report on International Religious Freedom just a few days ago, chronicling the increase in anti-Semitism in Europe. Anti-Semitic speech and anti-Semitic actions increased markedly in Germany and Russia. Incidents recently went up in the United Kingdom and Switzerland, and the Netherlands reported its most dramatic increase in anti-Semitic incidents ever. France experienced a 101 percent increase in anti-Semitic acts in 2014 compared to 2013 – which brings us to our responsibility. It is our responsibility to foster a different environment, because fostering acts and attitudes of tolerance and inclusion is the way to interrupt the ascent of hate. It can’t be stopped by an indifferent society.

I went to Paris at the beginning of this year after the horrible attacks that that city suffered. One of the most moving experiences I’ve ever had – hearing from those who were there that day in one of the world’s most beloved and admired cities, and suddenly, an evil that was assumed to be from the past was all too present again.

For people who experienced that day, it was a sadly life-changing moment – a “before” and “after” reality in their lives. And a few weeks later, I had the honor of meeting in New York with Rabbi Haim Korsia, the Chief Rabbi of France. We spoke about the murders, we spoke about the attacks. And Rabbi Korsia was more focused on what happened before the attacks and what we have to learn from it. He pointed out that the halfway to that horrible day in Paris was paved by one moment after another of indifference – that too many warning signs went unaddressed; too many taunts, too many instances of bullying, too many threats were left to fester.

We know that an isolated attack is a horrible thing, but again, the isolated attacks start to add up when there is an atmosphere of indifference. Again, quoting Elie Wiesel, “Indifference . . . is more dangerous than anger and hatred. Hatred at times may elicit a response. You fight it. You denounce it. You disarm it. Indifference elicits no response. Indifference is not a response.”

So let's face it – in so many nations, the enemies of tolerance take their cues from that lack of response, and they will fill any void with hatred. So it's our time now to speak up, to stand up, put into action the lessons we've learned about the dangers of indifference.

And these lessons are powerful because they aren't abstract. In fact, you can walk the streets of New York City, or Paris, or Jerusalem, and still meet survivors of the Holocaust who will tell you their story – people who are living this very day who will tell you what it looked like.

I recall very vividly, and with sorrow, being at a Shabbos dinner in Borough Park in Brooklyn. In the middle of an otherwise joyous evening, an older woman rolled up her sleeve to reveal the numbers that had been tattooed on her arm at Auschwitz.

This happened in the lifetime of people still with us today, and that should remind us of our need to act now.

And we as mayors – we owe it to those who survived – and we especially owe it to those who were lost – to act. We owe it to Jewish people all over the world – and all our brothers and sisters of all faiths – to act, to stand up against bias and prejudice in all its forms, to make all of our cities capitals of inclusion and tolerance. And we know this takes constant effort, and it takes consistency – sending a signal at every turn that no act of hate is acceptable, that even acts that may appear small must be addressed.

I have a parallel to make from our own experience in New York – and this is not our experience in fighting bias, which is rich, and which is an area we focus on deeply. But we've also had a long experience of fighting violence and crime. And we had to think differently. We had to make changes in our approach to turn away from the violence that gripped us.

New York City, over 20 years, has been on a journey towards greater and greater safety in our city. We're proud to say that we're the safest large city in America. But that happened for a reason, and in that reason is a parallel to the approach we must take to fighting intolerance.

In 1994, our then Police Commissioner and, I'm pleased to say, our Police Commissioner again, Bill Bratton, changed the approach to crime and disorder – addressed the fears of people all over the city. He pioneered a set of reforms, and those reforms required a response to any acts of law breaking, no matter how small. And that very simple notion – not looking away when the law was broken – started to change us, started to raise the bar. And that's what we have to strive for in fighting prejudice and bias. That's what we have to strive for in protecting Jewish communities and all people.

We call this approach to fighting crime the “broken windows” strategy. Well, there is a “broken windows” strategy necessary to fighting bias and intolerance – to fighting anti-Semitism and all forms of hate. The theory is quite simple. If we don't attend to one broken window, we implicitly extend an invitation to break another, and another after that, and another after that.

So we as leaders have to push to remind, forcefully, our national governments that they have to learn this same lesson. They can't look away from incidents. They can't fail to respond. Cities – cities express the values of democracy, and tolerance, and pluralism, and we sadly are often the venue where hatred arises the most. But we know something that national governments need to learn more deeply – that we won't allow that invitation to the next incident and the one after that.

You know – Paris – the people of Paris would never have expected the attacks of Charlie Hebdo and Hyper Cacher. They were not only unexpected – the people of the France and the national government in France were not prepared and they weren't focused, because they had underestimated the threat. We saw what happened – 17 innocent lives lost and then, just weeks later, 300 graves desecrated at a cemetery outside Paris. A terrible time, but a time that also offers us a reminder that people can learn and act quickly in the aftermath of those horrific attacks.

France entered a new era of vigorous, and consistent, and unsparing response to hatred. The French government tightened security at Jewish institutions; posted police and soldiers outside Jewish schools, and community centers, and places of worship. President Hollande said, “Everything will be done to make sure those responsible for the odious and barbaric act will be identified and punished. France is determined to fight relentlessly against anti-Semitism and those who would attack our values.” That very statement set a new tone and indicated a new approach.

Prime Minister Manuel Valls announced 100 million euros invested in combatting racism and anti-Semitism. Crimes driven by hate were subjected to harsher sentences. The government of France learned a powerful lesson and acted on it, and did not evince that quality of indifference that can so often lead to the next danger. French people now hear constant and strong messages against hatred, against racism, against anti-Semitism – but a particular focus on teaching the children of that nation about the history of anti-Semitism and racism that has to be overcome.

And most recently, my good friend and colleague Anne Hidalgo of Paris – the mayor of that great city, became the first European mayor to sign on to the Mayors United Against Anti-Semitism Initiative developed by the American Jewish Committee.

It is perhaps no wonder that over the summer, we saw progress. The Anti-Defamation League found that anti-Semitic sentiment among the French people dropped fully 20 percent in 12 months’ time – because there was a vigorous response, because there was a message of change.

Now, let’s be clear and let’s be blunt – other governments have not shown the same vigor and commitment to their Jewish communities. Poland has a particularly painful history of anti-Semitism. There have been multiple cemetery desecrations this year. Graves that are so precious to families and to the community were found defaced and destroyed. And today, according to recent surveys, 37 percent of Poles harbor, openly, anti-Semitic sentiment – an extraordinary and an unacceptable number.

As I said earlier, we’re not – in New York City or in the United States – we’re not immune, we’re not perfect. But we know we have to hold ourselves to a high standard, and we have to be vigilant. And we know we have to be consistent. No message is worthwhile if it’s not consistent.

We respond to acts of bias. We respond not only when there is an act of bias and hatred against the Jewish people in our city, but even when there is an act elsewhere in the world. We immediately provide additional police protection at key Jewish community locations to send a message that we will protect the community – to send a message of embrace and support, because we recognize that a community that has suffered again over centuries, and in fact millennia, has every reason to worry that an act of hatred elsewhere in the world could spread.

I hope, in our way, we are providing some productive example to the world and the governments that share many of our values but still haven’t acted strongly enough, to the governments that must still take additional steps to truly protect their Jewish brothers and sisters.

We do this because we understand history and we refuse to repeat it. And we reject the dangerous path of indifference.

And in this we call upon everyone – everyone to work to protect our Jewish brothers and sisters, because people of conscience come from all faiths and all backgrounds. Here, we just passed the path of the Righteous Among the Nations – brave men and women who during the Holocaust were willing to sacrifice their lives to uphold basic human values. They are heroes, and they are reminders to us. But let’s face it – there weren’t enough. There weren’t enough who stood apart. There weren’t enough who were willing to risk.

But anytime we need a reminder, it's usually available [inaudible] to us. Just this year, in those horrible attacks in Paris, think about a new man who belongs among the righteous – Lassana Bathily, a Muslim immigrant from Mali working at the Hyper Cacher market. As the attacker burst in, Lassana immediately helped to hide the customers in the store to make sure they were safe, and he ran to the police to get help. And afterwards – and this says everything we need to remember today – afterwards, this very unassuming hero was asked why he did it, why he risked his life, why he responded so quickly, and clearly, and honestly, and he said, very simply, “We are brothers.”

So we have to act like brothers and sisters across all lines. And we – local leaders, leaders in democratic nations – have to live up to our mandate. When we see intolerance, we can't let it be someone else's problem. We have to recognize it as our problem. We have to stand up to it, or else we aren't true leaders.

One of our greatest leaders in the United States of America, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said it so simply and so powerfully: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” That is the standard we need to hold.

And one thing we can all do, and what we can do to encourage our fellow mayors all over the world to stand up, is to ask them to join the American Jewish Committee's Mayors United Against Anti-Semitism Initiative. So far, 303 mayors from almost every state in the United States have signed on, representing over 75 million people.

But we need mayors all over the world to do the same, and to live out the commitment – to say that there is no place for indifference in our cities, and that we will not allow our national governments to act indifferently as well – that we can and we will beat back the forces of division and violence, that we can create a world where the Jewish community can live in peace anywhere, and all communities can live safely, free of fear.

Together, we can work towards a world where we truly achieve the notion of “Never again.”

Thank you, and God bless.

###