Our mission is to preserve and protect Jewish life in Canada through advocacy.

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Who we are

The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) is the advocacy agent of the Jewish Federations of Canada. As a Canada-wide, non-partisan, non-profit organization, we represent the diverse perspectives and concerns of more than 150,000 Jewish Canadians affiliated with their local Jewish Federation. As the Canadian affiliate of the World Jewish Congress, representative to the Claims Conference and to the World Jewish Restitution Organization, CIJA is also connected to the organized Jewish community internationally.

What we do

CIJA’s mission is to protect Jewish life in Canada through advocacy. We advance the public policy interests of the organized Canadian Jewish community. Our main priorities include combating antisemitism, ensuring the security of the Jewish community and its institutions, and educating Canadians about the important role Israel plays in Jewish life and identity.

How we do it

We build meaningful partnerships and relationships with leaders in government, academia, media, civil society, and among other religious and ethnic communities. These partnerships support our advocacy on behalf of the organized Jewish community, ensuring our voices are heard and perspectives effectively reflected in Canadian public policy.
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Launch the Community Security Trust to complement the Security Infrastructure Program

The Security Infrastructure Program (SIP) is a key initiative that provides essential funds to institutions to enhance their security infrastructure. The SIP provides funding to private, and non-profit organizations at risk of hate-motivated crime to mitigate the costs of security infrastructure improvements such as alarm systems and bollards. The efficacy and importance of this program are clear: a security guard at Congregation Shaar Hashomayim in Montreal thwarted an arson attack on the synagogue thanks to the surveillance cameras partly financed by the program.

While the SIP provides essential infrastructure funding, it is only half of the solution. It is essential to empower, equip, and train community members to be aware, identify, and deter threats and to have the capacity to partner effectively with law enforcement for deterrence and information-sharing purposes.

Recommendation

Complementing the SIP with an initiative giving communities the capacity to deter threats and assume some responsibility for protection of its communal institutions and users. This program can be modelled after the Community Security Trust in the United Kingdom, which includes training for volunteers on how to provide non-armed patrols, promote situational awareness and threat prevention, and liaise with local law enforcement.
As one of the groups frequently targeted for hate-motivated crime, the Jewish community spends millions of dollars every year on security measures, including significant sums expended by synagogues, day schools, and Jewish community centres on security personnel.

**Recommendation**

Establishing a federally funded security subsidy program for at-risk places of worship, schools, and community centres – regardless of identity. Institutions that pay for security personnel (guards from licenced companies or paid-duty police officers) could submit those receipts with their annual filing to the Canada Revenue Agency and be reimbursed for a portion of the total cost.
Canada is one of the best countries in the world to be Jewish, but statistics show that the Jewish community nevertheless remains one of the most frequently targeted minorities for hate crime.

The Jewish community recognizes that physical security requires active partnerships with government and law enforcement. Measures that empower the community to have a greater role in ensuring its own safety – such as situational awareness training and security audits – are key to preventing hate crime. In 2019, Statistics Canada reported that Jews and Jewish institutions were the most frequently targeted religious minority for police-reported hate crime, and we have witnessed a spike in antisemitic incidents in May 2021. Synagogues and Jewish institutions are at risk of attack by violent extremists.

**Recommendations**

Instructing intelligence services and local and national law enforcement organizations to designate community “point people” to liaise with the organized Jewish community. These officers will provide the Jewish community with timely information on threats, security developments and best practices, and respond to emerging community concerns.

Using the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, establishing a government-mandated definition of antisemitic “hate crimes” as the uniform, national standard to determine what constitutes a hate-motivated crime and to inform law enforcement’s approach to hate crime investigations and laying of charges.

Creating dedicated hate crime units within all law enforcement services across the country, including resources and training to address the unique features of hate-inspired crime and ensuring currently established hate crime units are adequately equipped and trained to respond to hate.

Enhancing training for law enforcement, Crown Attorneys, Attorneys General, and the judiciary regarding antisemitism, how to recognize it, and appropriate responses to incidents of antisemitism, including thorough investigations of suspected hate crimes and laying of criminal charges.

Equipping law enforcement and intelligence services with the tools needed to combat extremism.
Criminalize Holocaust denial

What starts with Jews never ends with Jews. The Holocaust was a horrific genocide where more than six million Jews and other targeted minorities, one and a half million of whom were children, were systematically murdered. The truth of the Holocaust as an attempt to eradicate all Jews is irrefutable, but the harm of Holocaust denial lives on, in part because of those exploiting social media to spread their toxic disinformation, perpetuate antisemitism, and try to erase Jewish history, trauma, and suffering.

**Recommendation**

Amending the Canadian Criminal Code, as has been done in Germany, France, Austria, and other countries, to include Holocaust denial as an indictable offence, thus countering the trend of denying the Holocaust as a means of trivializing or refuting historical fact, Jewish victimization, and Jewish lived experience.
Education is critical to combating hate and antisemitism. In a 2021 nationwide Jewish community Town Hall, education was the top priority for Jewish Canadians in combating antisemitism. The Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness Survey conducted by the Claims Conference demonstrated that an alarming 22% of Canadian millennials have not heard, or are unsure if they have heard, of the Holocaust; and 62% of Canadian millennials were not aware that six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust. We must keep the torch of memory alive for future generations. According to a CIJA survey, 84% of those surveyed said they were concerned that Jewish students will be excluded at school because of their Jewish identity. While academic institutions have taken steps to teach and promote diversity, information pertaining to antisemitism, the Holocaust, and Jewish lived experience is omitted or, worse, dismissed.

**Recommendations**

Developing, based on experts’ research, a standardized national social studies curriculum focusing on antisemitism and the Holocaust that integrates into the overall IDE (Inclusion, Diversity and Equity) program and extends it beyond the current frameworks, which will benefit not only Jews but also all at-risk communities.

Furthering the implementation of the IHRA definition of antisemitism and developing an IHRA handbook to explain and guide the application of the IHRA definition. This handbook can be modelled after the European Union’s *Handbook for the practical use of the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism*.  

**Antisemitism and Holocaust education**
As seen in attacks on Jewish communities in Pittsburgh, San Diego County, Jersey City, and Monsey, as well as on mosques in Christchurch and elsewhere, online threats can – and often do – lead to real-world violence.

In 2019, after CIJA mobilized thousands of Canadians to speak out on the issue, the House of Commons Justice Committee conducted a study of online hate. Its report included a series of recommendations in line with CIJA’s proposals – including a robust plan to track online hate, prevent online hate through education, and make better use of legal tools to stop online hate.

**Recommendations**

Launching a national, social literacy campaign to sensitize Canadians to the potent role social media plays in bullying, harassment, intimidation, dissemination of hate, and threats.

Establishing strong and clear regulations for online platforms, and Internet service providers for monitoring and transparently addressing incidents of hate on their platforms. These regulations would make it easier for users to flag incidents of hate and should mandate that providers include appropriate definitions of hate, including the IHRA definition of antisemitism.

Complementing the social media literacy campaign with legislation governing the responsibilities of social media platforms to monitor hate on their sites and pursue both preventative and corrective actions to ensure platforms are safe and not exploited as instruments of hate.

Increasing resources for law enforcement, Crown Attorneys, and judges to ensure they receive sufficient training on how to apply existing laws to effectively address online hate.

Directing Statistics Canada to address the gap in data collection by allocating resources to create a national database of hate crimes where individuals can report online hate incidents.
Section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act, an effective but flawed tool in combating online hate speech, was removed in 2013. This left a gap in the effort to protect Canadians from hate speech that could be addressed in several ways.

In 2021, the Government tabled Bill C-36 An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Canadian Human Rights Act and to make related amendments to another Act (hate propaganda, hate crimes and hate speech) that proposes amendments to Section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code to combat hate speech.

**Recommendations**

Re-establishing an improved provision in the Canadian Human Rights Act to combat hate speech that would replace the flawed, previous Section 13. This new provision would act not as a sword but as a shield to protect legitimate freedom of expression and prevent the Section’s vexatious use. The new section should adopt elements from private members bill C-671.

Strengthening Canadian tax laws to prohibit Canadian charities from promoting or inciting antisemitism or violent extremism.
Establish an Anti-hate Advisory Council to the Prime Minister

We must all come together to make a meaningful difference in the fight against antisemitism and hate. An Anti-hate Advisory Council to the Prime Minister would be composed of members of at-risk minorities. It would provide a response to hate-motivated crimes when they occur, make proactive recommendations to address hate, and serve as an opportunity for at-risk groups to consult and collaborate.

Recommendation

Establishing an Anti-hate Advisory Council reporting to the Prime Minister comprising leading representatives from various at-risk communities to identify threats and solutions to specific community concerns and to develop a constructive protocol for intercommunity collaboration and cooperation.
In 2020, the Government of Canada announced the appointment of the Honourable Irwin Cotler as Canada’s Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism. Tasked with promoting Holocaust education and tackling Jew-hatred, the Special Envoy’s office plays a role that is valuable not only for Jews but for all Canadians.

**Recommendation**

Making Canada’s Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism a permanent office with an appropriate, sufficient, and dedicated operating budget to carry out the duties and mandate of the role over the long term.
Canadians can be proud of our track record providing billions annually in international assistance and humanitarian aid, funding medical supplies, water, and food. However, if released into the wrong hands, humanitarian aid can be syphoned off from its target population with deadly consequences. While Global Affairs Canada maintains records on Canadian-funded projects, these GAC records rarely reflect actions by implementing partners, sub-contractors, or secondary project partners. Organizations such as UNRWA have never published an annual educational oversight report. Lack of transparency and accountability facilitates potential misdirection of important humanitarian aid, harming populations in need.

**Recommendations**

Committing to publish an annual oversight report on UNRWA that is transparent and includes funding recipients, sub-contractors, the funding purpose, and project outcomes to ensure that Canadian humanitarian aid goes where it is intended.

Improving Global Affairs Canada transparency and information management processes for foreign aid funding. These process changes should include maintaining full records on project sub-implementors, names of implementing organizations, primary and secondary beneficiaries, contractors, sub-contractors, and outcomes of funds provided.
Israel is a key Canadian ally and the only liberal democracy in the Middle East. Unfortunately, some of the world’s worst human rights violators attempt to misuse UN bodies and other international fora as platforms to isolate Israel.

This practice unfairly targets Israelis, undermines peace efforts, and distracts the UN from the world’s most serious human rights challenges. In some cases, such as resolutions regarding Jerusalem’s holy sites that omit the historic and unique centrality of the city to the Jewish people, these initiatives are tainted by antisemitism.

**Recommendations**

Publicly opposing both the one-sided UN resolutions that single out Israel and the efforts to isolate Israel and to negate, in UN forums, the Jewish people’s historically indisputable connection to Jerusalem.

Ensuring the government’s positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict affirm the Canada-Israel alliance and draw a clear moral distinction between the defensive actions of Israelis and the illegal aggression of banned terrorist groups, such as Hamas and Hezbollah.
The Palestinian Authority’s Martyr’s Fund incentivizes and rewards violence by paying imprisoned or injured Palestinians or families of those killed as a result of committing acts of violence against Israelis. Recipients of funds include mass murderers and families of suicide bombers. This perverse program works on a sliding scale: the bloodier the carnage, the greater the reward. Payments as high as $4,000 a month are granted to Palestinian terrorists serving long-term jail sentences.

The Palestinian payments from the “pay-to-slay” program are higher than Palestinian minimum wages. In effect, the Palestinian Authority is incentivizing violence as a means to a livelihood instead of promoting peace and encouraging growth.

The Martyr’s Fund runs contrary to the Oslo agreements, international conventions on counterterrorism, and the laws of many countries.

The United States, Norway, Australia, and other governments have publicly denounced the “pay-to-slay” program.

**Recommendation**

Publicly calling on the Palestinian Authority to stop the “pay-to-slay” program and, alongside international partners, pressuring the PA to cease rewarding terrorism.
Samidoun (Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network) is a security threat. Operating in Canada, Samidoun has direct affiliation and ties to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) – an organization that has been placed on the list of terrorist entities under Canada's Criminal Code since 2003.

There is ample open-source information that ties Samidoun to the PFLP. In 2021, Israel designated Samidoun a terror group based on the organization’s direct affiliation with and ties to the PFLP. Most disturbing to Canada’s Jewish community, Samidoun has a significant and active presence in Canada where it holds events, raises funds, runs advocacy campaigns, and is active on university campuses.

**Recommendation**

Reviewing Samidoun’s activities in Canada to determine if the organization warrants being placed on the *Criminal Code* list as a terrorist entity.
Iran remains a leading threat to human rights and global security. The Jewish people are targeted by this threat, as demonstrated by Iran’s genocidal rhetoric against Israel and its sponsorship of terror groups, such as Hezbollah, that have targeted Jews internationally.

In 2018, a motion to place the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in its entirety on Canada’s list of terrorist entities passed the House of Commons with bipartisan support. However, despite overwhelming evidence about the nefarious role it plays in sponsoring worldwide terrorism, the IRGC has not yet been placed on the list of terrorist entities under the Criminal Code.

**Recommendations**

Ensuring there is no renewal of ties or lifting of sanctions until the Iranian regime demonstrates meaningful improvements and comes into full compliance with its international obligations.

Setting clear benchmarks to ensure diplomatic pressure is not relaxed as long as the regime continues violating the rights of Iranians, sponsoring international terrorism, and seeking Israel’s destruction.

Continuing use of the “Magnitsky Law” to freeze assets and block entry of Iranian officials involved in human rights violations.

Ensuring that the list of Iranian officials targeted by Canadian sanctions matches that of the European Union, the United States, and other key allies.

Following the will of the House of Commons, adding the IRGC in its entirety to the Criminal Code’s list of terrorist entities.
Food security programs provide an essential service for many Canadians living in poverty. For Jewish Canadians, there is an extra cost as Kosher foods are often more expensive and difficult to source. COVID-19 has highlighted inequality and created extra pressure on Canada’s food bank system. During the pandemic, under the Emergency Food Security Fund, the Government committed additional funds to enhance food security and help ensure that all Canadians have access to appropriate food. Due to the specific food required by their clientele, some Kosher food banks are unable to access funds. As we move from pandemic emergency response to recovery, it is important to ensure equity in Canada’s food bank system.

**Recommendation**

Ensuring food security for Jewish Canadians by continuing COVID-19 levels of food bank funding and requiring food security funding programs to acknowledge and protect access for ethnocultural communities with religiously mandated dietary requirements.
While Canada has weathered the COVID-19 pandemic better than many nations, months of physical distancing and social isolation have taken a drastic toll. According to data from the Canadian Mental Health Association's *Assessing the Impacts of COVID-19 on Mental Health* monitoring survey, 77% of Canadian adults feel negative emotions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Recommendations**

Prioritizing investments in ethnoculturally appropriate care for mental health initiatives, such as free and subsidized non-pharmacological therapy, as a cornerstone of our country's COVID-19 recovery. This should be undertaken in partnership with provincial governments.

Maintaining funding levels for ethnocultural social services established during the COVID-19 emergency.
The National Housing Strategy (NHS) includes important commitments to fund up to 2,400 new housing units for people with developmental disabilities. Programs within the NHS include funding for individuals with disabilities. While this funding is welcome, more must be done to address the severe gap in Canada’s efforts to alleviate poverty among the most vulnerable and to reduce affordable housing wait lists.

**Recommendations**

Continuing the implementation of the National Housing Strategy to increase capital and operating funding investments for ethnocultural affordable housing initiatives.

Continuing the National Housing Strategy and, where possible, working with the provinces and local service managers to enhance evidence-based, best practice models to ensure effective integration among health and housing policies.
According to the 2017 *Canadian Survey on Disability* by Statistics Canada, more than six million Canadians, or 22% of the population, identify as living with a disability. Persons with disabilities are more likely to have shorter life expectancies, live in poverty, and earn less compared to Canadians without disabilities.

**Recommendations**

Reforming the Disability Tax Credit to ensure it is more inclusive, particularly for those with non-physical and/or episodic disabilities that make gaining employment difficult; and working with disability advocates to make the application process more accessible.

Changing the Canadian Caregiver Credit from a non-refundable to a refundable tax credit and ensuring that all Canadians caring for relatives with a physical or mental impairment are treated equally.

Improving the Registered Disability Savings Plan by making withdrawals in situations of financial distress or housing needs less punitive.

Reviewing the impact of the ten-year rule to allow people under age 60 to access their RDSP funds.
An Act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was given Royal Assent in June 2021. Entrenching UNDRIP in Canadian law demonstrates our collective commitment to upholding the promises made to Indigenous peoples. Implementation of UNDRIP also sends a powerful message to Canada’s First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples that Canada is taking meaningful steps toward truth and reconciliation.

**Recommendation**

Prioritizing and quickly implementing UNDRIP as an important step toward truth and reconciliation.
Anti-Black racism is a malicious hatred that must be stopped. We all have a role to play in building a better Canada, free from racism, antisemitism, inequality, and inequity. According to a 2021 Abacus Data survey on Black entrepreneurship in Canada, the vast majority of Black entrepreneurs surveyed said anti-Black racism makes it harder to succeed and that access to capital was the top barrier to success.

**Recommendations**

Ensuring Black-owned businesses have access to credit and economic investment opportunities and increasing funding to support and strengthen them.

Using the 2018 Independent Street Checks Review as a blueprint for community policing practices and increasing police accountability to strengthen anti-bias training, social and cultural competency programs, and anti-discrimination policies within law enforcement agencies.

Improving publicly available data by mandating improvements to Statistics Canada's collection and analysis of data based on race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and socio-economic status.
In 2009, Canada and 45 other countries committed to the Terezin Declaration on Holocaust Era Assets. It calls for just and fair solutions regarding private communal and heirless property stolen from Jews during WWII, urging governments to “make every effort to provide for the restitution of former Jewish communal and religious property.”

Canadian governments across party lines have since made it a priority to urge Eastern European countries that have not already done so to pass effective restitution laws and to protect current restitution laws from amendments that would erode their effectiveness. Some countries – most notably Poland – have failed to do so. Given that thousands of Holocaust Survivors live in poverty, this failure to act is tragic.

**Recommendation**

Continuing diplomatic pressure on Eastern European countries that have evaded their responsibility to pass meaningful restitution laws; and protecting existing laws from erosion.
Support refugees fleeing persecution and genocide

As a community with a history of fleeing persecution, Jewish Canadians have played a significant role in supporting refugees. Through synagogues and agencies such as Jewish Immigrant Aid Services Toronto, Jewish Canadians have sponsored many refugees, including Yazidis, Syrians, and others, fleeing religious persecution.

Since 2016, the Chinese Government has committed ongoing mass atrocities against the Uyghur people in East Turkistan. A confidential Chinese government document suggests there may be up to 1,400 extrajudicial internment facilities in total, excluding prisons with capacity for up to 30,000 detainees.

The Government of China acknowledged that, between 2014 and 2019, an average of 1.29 million people in the region per year have undergone “vocational training,” a euphemism for forced stays in detention facilities. Reports have documented that the Uyghur people are subjected to extreme physical and mental torture in concentration camps as well as to forced labour, mass rape, enforced disappearances, frequent deaths, and organ harvesting. China's cruel treatment of the Uyghur people meets all criteria to be labeled a genocide under the UN Genocide Convention.

When faith or ethnic communities are targeted for genocide, or sexual minorities subjected to capital punishment, Canada’s refugee system must offer a safe haven, and Canada must act to condemn genocide.

Recommendations

Continuing support of those targeted for their identity, such as Christians and Yazidis in Iraq, LGBTQ2+ people in Chechnya and Iran, Rohingyas in Myanmar, and Uyghurs in China, while the government works to improve and accelerate the refugee process.

Drawing on Canadian civil society partners as sponsors and volunteers in supporting emergency initiatives to protect targeted minorities, as with the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program.

Condemning unequivocally the Uyghur genocide and working with partners in the international community to demand the closure of the concentration camps where they are interned.

Invoking the “Magnitsky Act” to hold perpetrators of violence responsible for their crimes against Uyghurs and working to protect the safety and security of Canadian citizens of Uyghur origin and their families.
From 2011 to 2016, the number of Canadians who reported that they are Jewish dropped by more than half. This was not due to a demographic change but to the removal of “Jewish” as a specific example in the question on ethnic origin and to the question on household religion being asked only in alternate censuses (or once in ten years). In 2021, “Jewish” was included with more than 500 examples of ethnic origin and, while religious affiliation was asked in 2021, it is not scheduled to be on the 2026 census.

A correct enumeration of Canada’s Jewish population is critical to the work of Jewish charities. Jewish Federations and Federation-funded social service agencies collectively spend tens of millions annually on charitable work throughout Canada to the benefit of hundreds of thousands of Canadians. This vital work requires access to accurate census data to provide a true picture of Jewish communities across Canada.

**Recommendation**

Ensuring Statistics Canada includes the religion question in every census, to prevent continued underreporting of Jewish Canadians.
During times of chronic shortages in Canada’s blood supply, LGBTQ2+ Canadians want to help save lives. Unfortunately, Canadian Blood Services (CBS) prohibits many LGBTQ2+ individuals from donating blood unless they have been celibate for at least three months.

CIJA’s National LGBTQ2+ Advisory Council has called for this requirement to be removed, noting that it promotes negative stereotypes regarding the LGBTQ2+ community. Canadians must have confidence that our blood supply meets the highest safety standards, but this cannot be achieved through discrimination. The current policy regarding LGBTQ2+ donations should be replaced with a science-based approach rooted in gender-neutral, behaviour-based screening methods. Combined with CBS’ continued testing of donations for HIV, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C, this new policy would allow for more precise, efficient, and cost-effective screening and would open the door to more Canadian blood donors.

Recommendation

Canceling the three-month celibacy requirement for LGBTQ2+ blood donors, in line with the policies of many other countries, including Israel.
The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs is the advocacy agent of the Jewish Federations of Canada