



The Center for the Study of
Contemporary European Jewry
The Lester and Sally Entin
Faculty of Humanities
Tel Aviv University

For a Righteous Cause

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The Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry at Tel Aviv University supports research on Jewish history, culture, and politics. It publishes the flagship annual Antisemitism Worldwide Report and the annual For a Righteous Cause Report. Every year, the Center organizes three seminars on Jewish affairs that are open to the public and publishes eight issues of Perspectives – analytic essays on contemporary Jewish life and thought.

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THE ARAB WORLD:

ONE GOD, ONE COMPOUND

Interreligious prayer (also commonly referred to as inter-religious rituals and interfaith worship) is one of the most challenging and controversial forms of interreligious dialogue. It confronts believers with delicate issues of fidelity and integrity and, as such, has traditionally been approached with caution and reserve by the world's major religions. Nevertheless, over the past few decades, religious scholars have identified a trend of interreligious prayer facilitated by greater contact among people from different religions.

There are several motivating factors for interreligious prayer. One is universalizing theological doctrines, which assert that different religious traditions are particular manifestations of a unified and transcendent divine reality. In monotheistic religions, for instance, universalizing theologies stress the existence of a singular God that watches over all of providence and cares for the whole of humanity. These theologies emphasize that particular visions of God in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity are secondary expressions. Universalizing theologies support shared prayers that rest on universal spirituality and individual search for an inner connection to the transcendent reality.¹

Interreligious prayer can also be motivated by social considerations: to express solidarity towards another religious group, to promote religious reconciliation, and to gain a better appreciation and understanding of the religious other.

Marianne Moyaert, a scholar of religions, argues that engaging with another religion's prayers and rituals allows one to reach a deeper level of familiarity with it, which would not have been possible through other forms of interreligious dialogue. This is because religious rituals embody tacit knowledge – the non-codified, experience-based knowledge of a religion. This tacit knowledge is the primary religious language that forms the basis of socialization into a religious tradition.

As Moyaert explains, “the devout spiritual life is rooted in concrete, seemingly arbitrary and non-essential practices.” The tacit knowledge carried within religious rituals can never be made fully explicit in scripture or religious text. Therefore, those who seek to gain a fuller understanding and appreciation of other religious traditions may be drawn to interreligious prayer gatherings.²

In 1986, Pope John Paul II gathered 160 religious leaders representing 32 Christian religions and 11 non-Christian world religions, including Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, among others, to the World Day of Prayer of Peace in Assisi, Italy. However, as the Pope stressed, the religious leaders came together to pray for peace and not to pray together. The day began

¹ Julia Ipgrave, “Case Study 3: Religious Rituals,” in Julia Ipgrave, ed., *Interreligious Engagement in Urban Spaces: Social, Material and Ideological Dimensions* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2019), pp. 213-221.

² Marianne Moyaert, “Inappropriate Behavior? On the Ritual Core of Religion and Its Challenges to Interreligious Hospitality,” *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 27:2 (2014), pp. 222-242.

with separate prayers by each religious group in a different church. Then, in the evening, they all gathered in the square before the Tomb of St. Francis, where each religious leader came forward to say a prayer for peace according to their tradition while the others listened in silence.³

The case of the World Day of Prayer for Peace represents one model of interreligious prayer gatherings, known as serial interfaith occasions or multireligious prayer. In this model, each religious group performs their own prayers in a sequential order, while participants from other religions listen and watch but do not actively participate. The rationale of this model is to show respect and appreciation for the religious traditions of others while maintaining the integrity of one's own.

Another common model of interreligious prayer is the guest/host model, where participants from one or more religious groups serve as guests at a gathering organized by a different religious tradition. The guests are generally allowed to participate as they wish or not at all, as long as they adhere to certain basic "rules of the house." The guest or host prayers often have social objectives rather than spiritual or religious ones.⁴

A third interreligious prayer model is inter-riting, united interreligious prayer, or integrative religious prayer. Unlike the other models, these prayers are intended for people to come to pray together rather than coming together to pray. There are no clear hosts or guests, and the goal is for everybody to participate in a common prayer. In inter-riting, there is an attempt to reach the "highest common denominator," seeking to find the uniting themes among the different religious traditions. These types of prayers pose a particular challenge to the believer because they actively participate in rituals that are foreign to their own.⁵

As Moyaert notes, rituals and prayers have objective meanings in religious traditions that transcend the personal concerns and intentions of the believer. This means that even if one does not believe in the meaning assigned to a ritual, they can still be viewed as committing, in a fundamental sense, to that religious tradition.⁶

Alongside these three models identified in the academic literature, we can identify a fourth, more novel, yet fascinating, model of interreligious prayers commonly known as interreligious worship spaces. While the traditional models encapsulate singular events that bring different religious faiths together, interreligious worship spaces permanently house two or more religious groups under the same compound. They offer believers the chance to encounter and experience religious diversity on a daily basis. In most cases, there is some degree of physical separation between the houses of worship of different religious groups.⁷ This could serve to generate a profound sense of security among worshipers, alleviating anxieties about the potential dilution of one's own faith.

³ Michael Amaladoss SJ, "Inter-religious Worship," in Catherine Cornille, ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 87-98.

⁴ Kathleen Mary Black, "Interfaith/Interreligious? Worship/Prayer? Services/Occasions? Interfaith Prayer Gatherings," *Religions* 13:6 (2022), p. 489.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Marianne Moyaert, "Inappropriate Behavior? On the Ritual Core of Religion and Its Challenges to Interreligious Hospitality," *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 27:2 (2014), pp. 222-242.

⁷ Wikipedia: Interfaith Worship Spaces (2023), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interfaith_worship_spaces.

While still rare, interreligious worship space initiatives have become more prominent in recent years, motivated by spiritual, social and political objectives. One of the most ambitious projects in this spirit is the Tri-Faith Commons in Omaha, Nebraska. Formally established in 2020, the center brings together in permanent residence a church, a mosque, a synagogue, and an interfaith center on 15 hectares in the American heartland. The four structures are connected by the Abraham Bridge, which serves as a focal meeting point for the three religions. There is also a Tri-Faith Garden and Orchard, where the different congregations come together to grow vegetables and fruits for those in need. The Common's programs, which are open to the general public, champion religious pluralism, dialogue and social justice. One such program is Taste of Tri-Faith. The project comprised an annual series of weekend worship services in the three worship houses where visitors can learn about the communities while breaking bread.⁸

Another interreligious worship space that is currently under construction is the House of One in Berlin. The sanctuary, supported and funded by the German government, is set to house a church, a synagogue and a mosque under a single roof on Leipziger Strasse. On this site, the oldest church in Germany stood for 750 years.

The three worship places in the House of One will surround the central hall (the largest room in the building where the three religions will engage in cultural, artistic, academic, and religious exchanges). A loggia above the central hall, standing 32 meters above the ground, will give visitors a beautiful view of the city. Upon laying the first cornerstone of the building in May 2021, President of the Bundestag Wolfgang Schäuble called it a “location of tolerance and openness” and stressed the importance of the project for promoting interreligious dialogue and fighting fanaticism and violence.⁹

The relatively new and yet underexplored model of interreligious prayer is at the core of two unique projects that have emerged in the Arab world in recent decades and took significant steps forward in 2023. These are the planned interreligious complex on Mount Sinai and the Abrahamic Family House complex in Abu Dhabi.

In the late 1970s, Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat became the first to propose, during peace talks with Israel, the creation of an interreligious complex on Mount Sinai (Jabal Musa) – the historical cradle of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This spiritual center was intended to house a synagogue, a mosque, and a church, all built side by side as a symbol of fraternity, tolerance and coexistence among the monotheistic religions.

In August 1980, during the holy Muslim month of Ramadan, while secluded in his holiday residence at the foot of Mount Sinai, Sadat called upon believers of all faiths to join him in his historic mission to establish a shared religious complex that would “illuminate the path for

⁸ Tri-Faith Initiative (2023), <https://www.trifaith.org>.

⁹ German Federal Ministry of Housing, Urban Development, and Housing, German Federal Ministry of the Interior, Berlin Senate, House of One, 2023, <https://house-of-one.org/en>, and Kate Connolly, “‘House of One’: Berlin Lays First Stone for Multi-faith Worship Center,” *The Guardian*, May 27, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/27/berlin-lays-first-stone-for-multi-faith-house-of-one-worship-centre>.

future generations.” Egypt began collecting donations for the project, and Egyptian, French, and Israeli designers were selected to draft its architectural plans.¹⁰

Henry Kissinger, who played a pivotal role in the Yom Kippur War armistice agreement and subsequent Israeli-Egyptian negotiations that preceded the 1979 peace treaty, wrote about the profound importance Sadat attached to the Mount Sinai vision. The two became close friends and confidants in Sadat’s final years. As Kissinger recalls, during their last meeting in Washington, DC, in September 1981, Sadat initially invited Kissinger to participate in celebrating the Sinai’s return with the Egyptian people the following March.

However, after a brief moment of reflection, Sadat decided that Kissinger’s Jewish background might cause undue pain to the Israelis if he took part in the celebrations. Instead, he proposed an alternative plan, suggesting that they “let the territory come back. And then, a month later, you and I alone will take a trip through the Sinai, and we’ll go to the top of Mount Sinai, where I intend to build a synagogue, a mosque, and a church. And this will be a more meaningful celebration of the peace process than if you come to Cairo.”

Tragically, just two weeks later, on October 6, 1981, Sadat was assassinated before he could realize his vision.¹¹ Over the years, there have been some calls in Egypt to resurrect Sadat’s project, primarily because of its economic potential to enhance religious tourism to the historic sites of Mount Sinai and the Monastery of Saint Catherine. According to certain traditions, this is where God revealed Himself to Moses, imparting the Ten Commandments and the location of the biblical “burning bush.”¹²

Over the last decade, Egyptian President ‘Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi responded positively to these calls by initiating two projects. The first is an annual conference at the foot of Mount Sinai in Saint Catherine titled “Sinai: The Forum of Divine Religions... Let’s Pray Together.”

The first conference, held in December 2015, was intricately connected to the challenges that the new regime in Egypt has faced following the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood from power in July 2013. These included the construction of an anti-Islamist national identity; the establishment of a new religious discourse to counteract the radical Islamic ideas of ISIS and support Egypt’s fight against terrorism, especially in the Sinai Peninsula, where there were thousands of casualties and where significant damage was caused to the tourism sector; and a shift in focus to mitigating interreligious tensions between Egyptian Muslims and Christian Copts.

Thus, since 2015, these international interreligious conferences have officially aimed to denounce terrorism and extremism, highlighting Egypt’s pluralistic and rich religious heritage,

¹⁰ “Nida’ al-Ra’is al-Sadat ila Kull al-Mu’minin li-Isham fi Binaa’ Majma’ al-Adyan al-Thalatha bi-Sina,” August 6, 1980, <http://www.anwarsadat.org/>.

¹¹ University of Maryland, Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace & Development, “Remarks by the Honorable Henry Kissinger,” May 4, 2000, <https://sadat.umd.edu/events/remarks-honorable-henry-kissinger>.

¹² Sayyid al-Qimni, “Ka’bat Sina,” *al-Hiwar al-Mutamaddin*, March 21, 2010, <https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=208570>.

restoring Sinai's reputation as a safe destination for tourism and promoting interfaith dialogue.¹³ Participants included religious leaders from around the world, some of whom explicitly supported the revival of Sadat's plan for a religious compound.¹⁴

The conferences' primary goal was to strengthen Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt and beyond, with limited Jewish representation and without Israeli participation. At the October 2019 conference in Saint Catherine, the leader of Egypt's Jewish community, Majda Haroun, expressed her joy at representing her faith and attending a forum that unites the three monotheistic religions in a friendly atmosphere.¹⁵ However, since the Covid-19 pandemic, plans to resume the conference have been delayed.¹⁶

The second project, initiated by the Egyptian government in 2020 under the direction of President al-Sisi, is "Tajalli," or in its full name, "The Great Transfiguration on the Land of Peace." With a budget of four billion Egyptian Pounds (roughly 130 million US Dollars), this project aims to develop the area of Saint Catherine, strengthen its spiritual status, and establish it as a global center for religious tourism for Jews, Muslims, and Christians.¹⁷ According to President al-Sisi, this is where God's revelation occurred, prompting the need to develop a vision that pays homage to such a remarkable event.¹⁸

The project was supposed to be inaugurated in 2023, but its official opening has so far been delayed due to financial difficulties – a common occurrence for national projects in Egypt. In May 2023, the Egyptian Minister of Housing visited the project with the Governor of Southern Sinai to oversee its progress.¹⁹

Construction continues, albeit at a slower pace than planned, suggesting a commitment to see the project through, but a new inauguration date has yet to be set. Local officials expressed their hope of welcoming one million tourists annually, as Mount Sinai is the only place of revelation recognized by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (distinguishing it from Jerusalem and Mecca).²⁰

While the "Tajalli," project in Saint Catherine drew some inspiration from Sadat's idea, the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi closely aligns with his original vision. The Emirati initiative to construct a shared religious complex featuring a mosque, a church, and a synagogue was

¹³ "Sinai: The Forum of Divine Religions... Let's Pray Together," State Information Service, September 28, 2017, <https://beta.sis.gov.eg/en/media-center/events/sinai-the-forum-of-divine-religions-lets-pray-together/>.

¹⁴ Abu al-Sa'ud Abu al-Futuh, "Khabir Aathar Yutalibu bi-Ihya' Mashru' Mujamma' al-Adyan bil-Wadi al-Muqaddas," *al-Bawaba*, October 18, 2018, <https://www.albawabhnews.com/3328716>.

¹⁵ Ayman Muhammad, "A'shaqu Misr.. Ra'isat al-Ta'ifa al-Yahudiyya Tabki Athna' Takrimha fi Sant Katrin," *al-Balad*, October 17, 2019, <https://www.elbalad.news/4022198>.

¹⁶ Hani al-Asmar, "'Huna Nusalli Ma'an'.. Ihtifaliyyah 'Alimiyya 'ala Ard 'Sant Katrin,'" *al-Ahram*, October 20, 2021, <https://gate.ahram.org.eg/Massai/News/3051449.aspx>.

¹⁷ Rim Mahmud, "Ba'd Munaqashat al-Ra'is al-Sisi Lahu.. Mashru' 'al-Tajalli al-A'zam' fi Sutur," *al-Dustur*, August 16, 2022, <https://www.dostor.org/4154450>.

¹⁸ "al-Tajalli al-A'zam fi Sant Katrin," MAAT GROUP, April 8, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8JxZ-NKzOz0>.

¹⁹ Isra' 'Abd al-Mutallib, "al-Tajalli al-A'zam fawqa Ard al-Salam.. Madha Hadatha bi-Sant Katrin Ba'd Ziyarat Wazir al-Iskan?," *al-Balad*, May 31, 2023, <https://www.elbalad.news/5789292>.

²⁰ "Huna Tajalla Allah... Aathar Shahida 'ala Tarikh al-Diyanat al-Thalath fi Sant Katrin," *Sputnik*, February 9, 2021, <https://sputnikarabic.ae/20210209>.

first introduced in 2019 following the signing of the Document on Human Fraternity by the Pope and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar in Abu Dhabi. The House was inaugurated in February 2023 and opened to visitors the following month. Despite the similarity in name, the Abraham Family House has no direct connection to the Abraham Accords signed in September 2020 between the UAE and Israel.

The three houses of worship are designed with equal stature, size, and materiality to eliminate any sense of hierarchy. The Mosque is oriented towards Mecca, the Church towards the East, and the Synagogue towards Jerusalem.²¹

The Moses Ben Maimon Synagogue is the first official Jewish prayer house to open in the UAE, providing respectful representation of the Jewish religion in the heart of an Arab capital and representing another significant milestone in the recent development of public Jewish communal life in the country.

Alongside the three structures, which are separated and isolated from each other to preserve their autonomy, the Abrahamic Family House offers shared interfaith spaces for learning, gathering, and connection. The complex also includes a research center and a library which houses a collection of books on biblical studies, Talmudic studies, Islamic studies, and interfaith studies. It offers educational programs designed to facilitate interfaith dialogue, it organizes seminars hosted by each of the three places of worship, and it invites academics and influencers for discussions, while avoiding controversial political topics.²²

Each house of worship maintains its distinct rituals and holidays, welcoming visitors from diverse faiths to discover them. Last September, on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, about 150 Jewish residents of the UAE gathered at the Moses Ben Maimon Synagogue for traditional celebrations. They read Torah portions from a scroll dedicated to the memory of Sheikh Zayed, the founding father of the UAE. The scroll, presented in 2019 to his son Muhammad Bin Zayed by the local Jewish community, was transferred from the Presidential Palace to the synagogue in preparation for the first Rosh Hashanah in the sanctuary. During the Israel-Hamas war, the synagogue conducted special prayers for healing and redemption.

A guided tour of the Abrahamic Family House offers a brief overview of the three monotheistic religions and their shared representations and ideals, including the olive branch as a symbol of peace, concepts of purity and the significance of water in rituals. One instructor noted to the authors that Muslims adopted the practice of removing shoes upon entering a mosque from the biblical story of Moses. For him, a key message visitors should take and share from the House is that differences are the spices of humanity.

In the eyes of its founders, the Abrahamic Family House conveys spiritual messages. According to its official website, the vision is “for people to come together in peace,” celebrating diversity in faith. Its mission is to foster “common humanity through the exchange of knowledge,

²¹ “Our Mission & Vision,” Abrahamic Family House, <https://www.abrahamicfamilyhouse.ae/about-us#our-mission-vision>.

²² “Programming and Activities,” Abrahamic Family House, <https://www.abrahamicfamilyhouse.ae/education-dialogue#research-and-publications>.

dialogue, and the practice of faith.” Its core values are “peaceful coexistence, inclusivity, and the promotion of human fraternity.”²³

The target audiences of the House are twofold. On the international stage, it draws tourists from around the world, enhances the reputation of the UAE as a global advocate for religious moderation, and contributes to the fight against Islamophobia. One of its distinguished guests was the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, who visited the site in October 2023 and described it as an exemplary model for active exchange between faiths. Blinken, who is Jewish, added that “this is what the future of the region should look like.”²⁴

On the domestic front, the Abrahamic Family House aims to foster national cohesion and the UAE’s identity as a multicultural society, where communities from over 200 countries of origin and diverse religious backgrounds coexist harmoniously.²⁵ As of late 2023, approximately 1,000 worshippers attend Friday prayers at the mosque, and around 800 attend Sunday prayers at the church. Still, in contrast to the growing Muslim and Christian communities at the House, the synagogue’s Jewish community is much smaller as most of the Jewish population of the UAE resides in Dubai.

Both Egypt and the UAE encountered criticism regarding their efforts to establish interreligious venues. Egyptian dissidents accused President al-Sisi of following in Sadat’s footsteps, alleging a dubious agenda to sell Sinai to Israel and the Jews under the pretext of religious coexistence.²⁶ Critics of the Abrahamic Family House insinuated a conspiracy involving a Jewish-Zionist-American plot to create a new religion called “al-Ibrahimiyya,” which they believed could be detrimental to Islam.²⁷ These allegations were refuted by both Emirati officials and the Egyptian Islamic Research Center of al-Azhar.²⁸

Policy Recommendations

1. **Building on existing initiatives** that champion dialogue between Jews, Christians and Muslims, interreligious prayer spaces should also be promoted in Israel. Such initiatives should be carried out incrementally, commencing in areas where the likelihood of success is higher thanks to a history of interreligious pluralism and collaboration, such as Jaffa and Haifa.

²³ “Our Mission & Vision,” Abrahamic Family House, <https://www.abrahamicfamilyhouse.ae/about-us#our-mission-vision>.

²⁴ “US Secretary Blinken visits Abu Dhabi’s Abrahamic Family House,” *The National*, October 15, 2023, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/2023/10/15/us-secretary-blinken-visits-abu-dhabis-abrahamic-family-house/>.

²⁵ Ibtisam al-Kitbi, *Dawr Dawlat al-Imarat fi Tamkin al-Diblumasiyya al-Diniyya* (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Policy Center, 2023), pp. 15, 30, 48-47, 71-66.

²⁶ “‘Sinaa’ Multaqa al-Adyan al-Samawiyya’.. Da’m lil-Iqtisad aw Naz’ al-Huwiyya?,” *Arabi 21*, September 24, 2017, <https://arabi21.com/story/1036388/>.

²⁷ Ofir Winter and Ella Aphek, “The Arab World: Antisemitic Attacks on Normalization,” *Antisemitism Worldwide Report – 2021*, The Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry, Tel Aviv University, 2022, pp. 37-41.

²⁸ “Mujamma’ al-Buhuth al-Islamiyya bil-Azhar Yahsimu al-Jadal fi Mashru’ Bayt al-A’ila al-Ibrahimiyya,” *Bawabat al-Azhar al-Iliktruniyya*, March 18, 2023, <https://www.azhar.eg/magmaa/details/ArtMID/1097/ArticleID/69189/>.

2. **The ethos of East Jerusalem** as a shared interfaith prayer space for the adherents of the three monotheistic religions should be enhanced while respecting the autonomy of each religion in managing its holy sites. To ensure success, a bottom-up approach fostering dialogue and interactions among religious leaders and their communities should be prioritized.
3. **Bilateral religious tourism** between Israel and its Arab peace neighbors should be promoted to bring hearts closer, foster mutual understanding, emphasize shared values, and cultivate shared spaces of economic prosperity.

– **Dr. Ofir Winter and Alon Berkman**

ACROSS THE WORLD: NATIONAL PLANS AGAINST ANTISEMITISM

In last year's For a Righteous Cause Report, we noted the emerging consensus among governments and intergovernmental organizations regarding the essentiality of confronting antisemitism, preserving the memory of the Holocaust and conserving and developing Jewish heritage and life. One of the important tools offering a framework to mobilize resources, monitor progress, and raise awareness in the fight against antisemitism is developing and implementing national action plans. Such plans have the potential to constitute an important step and proactive response to antisemitism and emphasize a commitment to reducing its manifestations.

In 2023, several more countries published detailed national action plans to combat antisemitism, including the United States, France, Spain, Luxembourg and Latvia, and began working to implement them. Plans are tailored to the needs of each country but share several common foundational objectives, from increasing awareness, education, and understanding of antisemitism to improving safety and security for Jewish communities.

The success of national plans, however, lies in moving from expressing intentions to combat antisemitism to implementing those intentions and translating them into tangible achievements. Indeed, there are a number of challenges and factors that can limit the efficacy of such plans, including lack of political will, inadequate resource allocation, inadequate monitoring and evaluation, lack of legal changes, and changing political landscapes.

In May 2023, the United States released its first comprehensive national strategy to combat antisemitism, outlining actions to be taken by the executive branch, calling for Congress to act, and calling for action by state and local governments and civil society groups and organizations.¹ The new national strategy is based on four pillars: (a) increase awareness of antisemitism and American Jewish heritage; (b) improve safety and security of Jewish communities; (c) reverse the normalization of antisemitism; and (d) build coalitions to fight hate.

The Biden administration's national strategy is the latest effort by the US government to address rising antisemitism, prior to which the Trump, Obama, and Bush administrations and US Congress had developed and advanced a number of federal initiatives. In 2004, for example, President George W. Bush signed the Global Antisemitism Review Act. It established an office of a special envoy to combat antisemitism abroad.² The Biden administration elevated this position to an "Ambassador-at-Large" classification in 2021. In 2006, the Bush administration's Department of Education (DOE) issued a guidance under Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in federally-funded

¹ "The US National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism: Key Actions by Pillar," The White House, June 2, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/06/02/the-u-s-national-strategy-to-counter-antisemitism-key-actions-by-pillar-2/>.

² Public Law 108-332, "Global Antisemitism Review Act of 2004," October 16, 2004, <https://www.congress.gov/108/plaws/publ332/PLAW-108publ332.pdf>.

programs, to protect Jewish students from discrimination unless that discrimination was based on religious faith rather than race.³

Directives issued under the Obama and Trump administrations, particularly President Trump's 2019 Executive Order 13899 on Combatting Antisemitism, reaffirmed and strengthened the 2006 guidance to enforce with the same vigor Title VI against discrimination rooted in antisemitism as with other forms of discrimination covered by the Act.⁴ In recent years, the DOE's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) has opened discrimination investigations at several universities, including the University of Vermont, the University of California-Berkley and the University of Southern California.

Beyond calling on Congress and its members to regularly speak out against antisemitism, the strategy only encourages, but cannot compel, the legislative branch to act in two concrete ways:

- (A) Passing the 2024 budget to fully fund education initiatives (73 million Dollars) and the Department of Homeland Security's Nonprofit Security Grant Program (360 million Dollars), as well as to increase the DOE's OCR budget to 177.6 million Dollars to fund primary and secondary education and to counter antisemitism and discrimination.
- (B) Demanding Congress pass legislation reforming Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act to remove immunity from online platforms and hold social media companies accountable for the content on their platforms. However, at the time the Report went to print, Congress had not yet approved the 2024 budget, only passing a stopgap funding measure to avert a government shutdown. Nor has it passed legislation reforming Section 230 at the time of this writing.⁵

The onus of implementing the strategy largely fell on the executive branch with its numerous agencies, offices, and departments, requiring it to take a number of actions before the end of 2023. Following the publication of the national plan, the DOE launched its "Antisemitism Awareness Campaign," issuing a "Dear Colleague" letter reminding institutions of their obligations under Title VI.⁶ The National Science Foundation (NSF), Department of Homeland Security, and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) were required to expand resources for education on Jewish history and research on antisemitism. The NEH has thus far issued several calls for applications to fund research on antisemitism.⁷

³ Kenneth L. Marcus, "Anti-Zionism as Racism: Campus Anti-Semitism and the Civil Rights Act of 1964," *William & Mary Bill of Rights Journal* 15, no. 3 (2007): 837-891.

⁴ White House, "Executive Order on Combatting Antisemitism," Trump White House – National Archives, December 11, 2019, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-combating-anti-semitism/>.

⁵ "Biden Signs Stopgap Spending Bill to Avert Government Shutdown – White House," *Reuters*, November 17, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/uss-biden-signs-stopgap-spending-bill-white-house-says-2023-11-17/>.

⁶ Department of Education, "U.S. Department of Education Launches Antisemitism Awareness Campaign," May 25, 2023, <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-launches-antisemitism-awareness-campaign>.

⁷ See Collaborative Research Funding Opportunity Number: 20231129-RZ (August 2023) and Funding Opportunity Number: 20231011-DOI-DOC, "Dangers and Opportunities of Technology: Perspectives from the Humanities" (October 2023).

The most significant implementation of the plan was the Biden administration's extension of the protections of the 1964 Civil Rights Act to include also victims of antisemitism and other religious bigotry to eight other executive departments beyond the Department of Education. Under the instructions, the Departments of Agriculture, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Labor, Treasury, and Transportation will ensure federally funded programs in housing, food programs, and other areas do not discriminate on the basis of religion.⁸

The Biden-led national plan, however, has some weaknesses, especially its failure to adopt a clear definition of antisemitism. While the plan recognizes the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism as the “most prominent” definition of antisemitism, it does not officially adopt it as THE definition. It currently acknowledges the merit of others, particularly the Nexus Definition. To be sure, the Trump administration's 2019 executive order instructing all executive departments and agencies to use the IHRA working definition remains in force. Nevertheless, the failure to affirm its adoption in the national plan, or select another definition to use for that matter, has implications for policy and enforcement, because an operable definition is needed to guide its investigation, assessment, and enforcement of violations.

The French government unveiled in January 2023 its new plan to fight racism, antisemitism and discrimination, building upon the previous plan that was in effect between 2018 and 2020, but failed.⁹

The plan proposed 80 measures based on five pillars:

- (A) Identifying antisemitism and racism.
- (B) Measuring the phenomenon.
- (C) Improving education and training.
- (D) Strengthening penalties for perpetrators.
- (E) Supporting victims.

The plan includes indicators to assess whether it is working and adds important measures, including training teachers and school staff about antisemitism, training police using the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism to improve reporting of hate crimes, and making the country's criminal code for antisemitic and racist offenses more severe.¹⁰

In the fall of 2023, two members of the French National Assembly proposed a law addressing the latter measure to strengthen the legal response to racist and antisemitic offenses. According to the proposed law, No. 1727, a non-public racist insult will constitute a 5th-class infraction

⁸ Ron Kampeas, “Biden Expands Civil Rights Act Protections at 8 Cabinet Departments to Include Antisemitism,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, September 28, 2023, <https://www.jta.org/2023/09/28/politics/biden-tasks-eight-cabinet-departments-with-extending-civil-rights-protections-to-victims-of-antisemitism>.

⁹ Robin Richardot, “The Government Presents Its New Plan to Combat Racism and Antisemitism [French],” *Le Monde*, January 29, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2023/01/29/le-gouvernement-presente-son-nouveau-plan-de-lutte-contre-le-racisme-et-l-antisemitisme_6159787_3224.html.

¹⁰ “National Plan Against Racism, Antisemitism, and Discrimination Linked to Origin [French],” French Government, January 30, 2023, <https://www.gouvernement.fr/dossier-de-presse/plan-national-contre-le-racisme-lantisemitisme-et-les-discriminations-liees-a-lorigine>.

entailing a maximum 1,500 Euro fine, while the same public racist insult will be an offense punishable by up to one year in prison and a 45,000 Euro fine.¹¹ At the time this Report went to print, the law had yet to pass.

In January 2023, Spain's Council of Ministers adopted a seven-year action plan to implement the European Union's (EU) strategy to combat antisemitism.¹² The plan, developed in consultation with Spain's Jewish community, builds upon the integration of aspects of the EU's strategy in the country's legal and administrative systems to better accommodate discrimination against the country's Jewish population.

It aims to provide a more robust response to prevent and combat all forms of antisemitism by increasing resources and improving existing laws on equality and discrimination, promoting Jewish life in the country, and expanding the pedagogy, research, and memory of the Holocaust to combat denialism, distortion, and trivialization. The plan called for the establishment of a working group that would be responsible for its implementation, as well as the establishment of a special commission to monitor that progress is indeed being made.

To date, the effectiveness of Spain's national action plan is debatable. Initially praised by the Spanish Jewish community for its active engagement in formulating the plan, Jewish leaders in the country have expressed their disappointment in the lack of public support for the Jewish community amid the rise in antisemitic incidents in Spain following the October 7 Hamas attack. Moreover, the Spanish government has yet to establish the special commission to monitor the plan's implementation.¹³

Latvia and Luxembourg also adopted national action plans to combat antisemitism based on EU guidance in 2023. Manifestations of antisemitism in Latvia are low and mainly occur online. A key component of the plan there focuses on commemoration and remembrance, particularly of the Holocaust and the role of Latvians in perpetrating it with the Nazis. This is as well as adopting the IHRA working definition as a working tool at the national level.¹⁴ Luxembourg's national action plan, adopted in September 2023, shares the common objectives of enhancing security, fostering Jewish life and countering hate speech. How it will be implemented remains

¹¹ Shaya Baldassari, "Racist and Antisemitic Comments: A Bill Tabled to Guarantee Prison [French]," *Le Figaro*, September 14, 2023, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/propos-racistes-et-antisemites-une-proposition-de-loi-deposee-pour-garantir-la-prison-20230914>, and French National Assembly, "Proposed Law No. 1727 – 16th Legislature [French]," October 12, 2023, https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/16/textes/l16b1727_proposition-loi.

¹² "The Government Approves the Plan Against Antisemitism with a Protocol to Deal with Hate Crimes Against Jews [Spanish]," *rtve.es*, January 31, 2023, <https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20230131/gobierno-aprueba-plan-lucha-antisemitismo/2419253.shtml>. To read the plan: "Plan Nacional para Implemenar la Estrategia Europea de Lucha contra el Antisemitismo para 2023-2030," Government of Spain, January 2023, <https://www.mpr.gob.es/prencom/notas/Documents/2023/310123-PlanNacionalAntisemitismo.pdf>.

¹³ Alberto D. Prieto, "Jewish Communities Feel Abandoned by Pedro Sánchez: 'He Needs the Votes of Antisemiters' [Spanish]," *El Español*, October 12, 2023, https://www.elespanol.com/espana/politica/20231012/comunidades-judias-sienten-abandonadas-pedro-sanchez-necesita-votos-antisemitas/801170064_0.html.

¹⁴ "Action Plan for the Reduction of Racism and Antisemtism for 2023," Cabinet, Regulation No. 209, April 13, 2023, <https://www.km.gov.lv/en/media/33024/download?attachment>.

to be seen.¹⁵ Luxembourg was only the 11th EU member state to develop a national action plan, meaning less than half of EU member states have adopted such a plan despite the EU calling on its members to do so by 2023.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Develop National Action Plans.** The majority of EU member states have yet to adopt national action plans. The EU Commission should encourage remaining states to adopt and implement plans without delay, learning from the best practices and effective solutions of others.
2. **Set Objectives.** The obvious should be stated: The objective of combatting antisemitism is that there is less of it. National action plans must include clear, transparent, measurable and attainable goals for the reduction of antisemitic attacks of all kinds.
3. **Invest.** While benchmarks for success and monitoring are necessary, so too is securing the funding required to implement the actions called for. Priorities include enhancing security, training and education on antisemitism, Jewish history, and the Holocaust.

– *Dr. Carl Yonker*

¹⁵ Government of Luxembourg, “Xavier Bettel Presents the National Action Plan to Combat Antisemitism,” Government. lu, September 27, 2023, https://gouvernement.lu/en/actualites/toutes_actualites/communiqués/2023/09-septembre/27-bettel-schnurbein.html.



Hakan Can

MUSLIMS. JEWS. TOGETHER

Hakan Can is the Deputy Head of the Department for Fostering Austrian-Jewish Cultural Heritage and Combatting Antisemitism at the Federal Chancellery of Austria. **Prof. Uriya Shavit**, Head of the Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry, has conducted field studies and researched Islam in Europe for the past 17 years. In the aftermath of October 7, they discussed the future of Jewish-Muslim relations in Austria and the continent at large.

Prof. Shavit: A lot of people have the impression that the Muslims of Europe, with a definite article, are the enemies of Israel and of the Jews. Do you believe that is the case?

Mr. Can: That is far too complex a statement for me to be able to simply agree or disagree because “the Muslim” does not exist. Who would you mean? Me, my wife, someone else?

The Islamic religious community in Austria (*Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft*) condemned the acts of violence and blatant human rights violations of October 7 in strong terms. It also responded to the Pro-Palestinian protests in Austria by calling for the cessation of any form of glorification of violence.

You have to consider that in Austria we have 16 recognized religious communities (*Religionsgemeinschaften*). One of them is the Jewish community (*Israelitische Religionsgesellschaft*). Another is the Muslim community (*Islamische Glaubengemeinschaft*). Ninety percent of the mosques in Austria are under the umbrella of that community, and they condemned Hamas. We also have the Alevi community (*Alevitische Glaubensgemeinschaft*), not to be confused with the Alawites from Syria. These are Alevi Muslims who primarily come from Turkey.

The existence of religious communities with the status of public bodies enables the state to talk directly to their representatives. We are, however, aware that they do not represent everyone. There are around 700,000 Muslims in Austria and the vast majority of them are not under the umbrella of the Islamic Community. Some are secular. Some, even if they attend mosques, are still not members of the official community.

Pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Austria are typically attended by approximately 500 to 700 people. A relatively small number if you consider that there are around 700,000 Muslims in the country. If they were all anti-Israeli, you would see bigger demonstrations.

Note that the majority of Muslims in the country are of Turkish descent. Other significant ethnic groups within the Muslim population include Bosniaks, Albanians and North Macedonians with Albanian roots. Arabs constitute a minority within the broader Muslim community.

Prof. Shavit: Muslims in Europe are divided along so many different lines. Ethnicity creates a major division. It matters whether you are a Turk, a Pakistani, a Bosnian or a Moroccan. It matters a great deal in terms of how you manifest your Islam. Ideologies matter, and personal differences matter. Religio-legal orientations matter. Political orientations matter.

When it comes to relations with Judaism and approaches to Israel, my impression has been that there is great resentment among some people, but more commonly, there is indifference. It is just not something that preoccupies people. There are some European Muslims, including North Africans, who are interested in forging relations with Jewish communities because they realize that they have shared interests and shared experiences. I feel that European Jewish communities and the State of Israel are not exhausting the potential of that goodwill.

Mr. Can: I would like to give you an example of the relations between our religious communities.

Last April, roughly ten Austrian imams and ten representatives of the Islamic community, along with ten representatives from the Jewish community, visited Auschwitz together. The President of the Islamic Community recited from the Quran next to the crematorium, honoring those who were brutally murdered by the Nazi regime.

We also plan to have imams dedicate one day each year to addressing antisemitism in their mosques. This initiative has not been implemented yet, but the intention is there.

In Austria, I can confidently say that the relations between religious communities, particularly between the Jewish and Muslim communities, are good. Some representatives share strong friendships, like one of our imams who, together with a rabbi, visited schools in Austria to talk with students about interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

It is those interpersonal encounters that we need to promote in order to break down prejudices and build mutual trust. We are proud of those relations. You might not, however, have those in countries like France – an example of fractured relations because of the separation between state and religion.

Prof. Shavit: Am I correct that Islam in Austria is more state-supervised and state-regulated than in other European countries? For example, you do not allow the importation of imams?

Mr. Can: After we disallowed this importation, I observed that the youth tend to gravitate towards other mosques with less educated imams. Simply having imams with insufficient education, as opposed to imported imams, is not an ideal alternative, in my opinion.

While I comprehend the rationale behind the policy – aiming for imams who are familiar with Austrian society and proficient in the German language – it is evident that we still face challenges in having a sufficient number of qualified imams.

Personally, I would have preferred an interim solution to address this gap. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that Austria, as a state, is justified in wanting to avoid external influences in religious matters.

Prof. Shavit: There are shared interests between Jews and Muslims. For example, regarding the debates on Halal and Kosher butchering, circumcision, and wearing headscarves.

Mr. Can: Yes, indeed. However, while these issues were previously subjects of debate in Austria, this is no longer the case. There is no sense of urgency among the Jewish and Muslim communities in terms of cooperation on these particular matters.

Prof. Shavit: Tell me something: How does a nice Austrian Muslim boy of Turkish extraction end up being the person responsible for fighting antisemitism in Austria?

Mr. Can: Well, I am an example of the good relations between the communities.

Here is how it happened. In 2010, for my civil service, I spent one year in Jerusalem and volunteered at the Austrian Pilgrimage Hospice.

I chose Israel for a reason. This was right after the Freedom Party had become the second largest political party in Austria and entered the coalition government. One of the items on their agenda was to segregate Austrian children based on ethnicity from other kids in schools. At least that was the claim made during discussions within the Muslim community.

I vividly recall the evening when we were around the dinner table at home.

My mother expressed concern to my father, telling him that if they actually separated children at school, we would move back to Turkey the next day. Attempting to reassure her, I responded, “Mom, it’s just schools.”

She retorted, “That’s how it started with the Jews in Austria; it started with state-regulated separation and culminated in a genocide. At that time, there was no Israel. Now, they have Israel, and it serves as life insurance for all Jews around the world. Our insurance is Turkey.” At the time, we had Turkish citizenship.

This conversation sparked my curiosity about the Jewish people and that is how I found my way to volunteering at the Pilgrimage Hospice.

I worked at the reception, I washed dishes, and I served as a waiter at the hospice’s charming Viennese coffeehouse. You could truly savor the classic Viennese coffee Melange alongside the traditional Austrian Sacher cake.

After that, I studied Political Science at the University of Vienna and then embarked on a diverse professional journey that included a tenure at the Austrian Embassy in Ankara. There I served as an officer for science and cultural affairs.

During a period marked by strained relations between Austria and Turkey, I sought collaborative initiatives and found like-minded people facing similar challenges, particularly among colleagues at the Israeli Embassy. The collaboration led me to delve into the complex issues of antisemitism in both Austria and the Muslim world.

When I returned to Austria, I began working at the Office of Religious Affairs at the Federal Chancellery and specifically engaged with the Muslim community. When the government announced a national strategy for combatting antisemitism, I was entrusted with a pivotal role in that initiative.

Prof. Shavit: Did you ever experience anyone from the Jewish community feeling uncomfortable with a Muslim being the one responsible for combatting antisemitism?

Mr. Can: No, absolutely not. I am very close to the Jewish community. They invite me to relevant events, and I also participate in events hosted by the Israeli Embassy.

The vast majority of Muslims in Austria harbor no issues with Jews. In 2022, we had 719 antisemitic incidents, and 55% of them were attributed to the right, with 20% to the left and only 9% to the Muslim community.

While I certainly don't want to downplay the significance of those 9%, since every percentage is too much, the figures clearly show that antisemitism in Austria stems from various quarters, not just the Islamist scene.

Prof. Shavit: The Turkish public discourse is not devoid of antisemitism. Were you exposed to antisemitism as a child?

Mr. Can: No, never. During my childhood, I regularly attended a mosque and there was never any sign of antisemitism there.

I closely follow Turkish media, and while there is considerable coverage of Erdogan's anti-Israel and antisemitic rhetoric, there are also opposition leaders in parliament who denounce the Hamas attacks as acts of terror.

Prof. Shavit: Is it more dangerous to be visibly identifiable as a Jew in Austria since October 7? Not only in regard to Muslims, but also in general?

Mr. Can: I would say it is. The Reporting Centre for Antisemitism (Antisemitismus-Meldestelle) of the Jewish Community of Vienna (IKG Wien) noted a 300% increase in antisemitic incidents from the month following October 7 to mid-November. This is compared to the same period the previous year.

The days immediately after the attacks, 70% of Jewish parents did not send their kids to school. If they feel that their children are not safe, then I would say yes, there is danger.

Prof. Shavit: In all the years of knowing Israel, Israelis and Jews, what surprised you the most?

Mr. Can: I was surprised at how similar Israelis and Turks are. Very loud and very emotional.

That was my biggest surprise. Realizing the striking similarities between those two groups. The tension between secularists and religious people in both societies is particularly reminiscent. That there is solidarity when it is needed. Turkey, in many ways, resembles Israel more than it does Syria.

What are your thoughts? I assume you have visited Turkey?

Prof. Shavit: I always felt that the two countries are like twins separated at birth. But you know, sometimes the most vicious fights are within the family...

Mr. Can: Indeed, that is true.

When Turks discuss the Ottoman era and the Empire, they often express immense pride that the Sultan invited the Jews who were expelled from Spain to the Ottoman Empire. They take pride that the Jews felt comfortable living in the Empire. It is interesting that individuals can express pride in the kindness their ancestors showed to Jews, and yet, in the next sentence, some make antisemitic comments.

When I visited Israel, I also noted how similar Judaism and Islam are.

While recognizing their differences, I experienced the close affinity between these two religions. I noted the practice of some women abstaining from shaking hands with men due to religious convictions. The shared prohibition on pork and the tradition of circumcision, too. As a political scientist, I posit that Israel is not in Europe, but from Europe. I believe that Turkey is not from Europe, but in Europe.

Prof. Shavit: Did you ever get any negative response from the Muslim community about your job?

Mr. Can: Never. I am often told that it is commendable to have a Muslim in my position as it serves to counter the misconception that all Muslims are antisemitic.

I would like to take this opportunity to emphasize a crucial point.

In 2023, if we cannot collectively protect a minority that has been persecuted numerous times throughout history, then we, as humanity, have failed.

If Jews are not safe in public spaces, then we have gone 80 years back in time. We are all aware of the dire consequences that followed. World War II was not only a catastrophe for the Jews, but for all of humanity.

We, therefore, have to dedicate every effort to fighting antisemitism, racism and discrimination at large.

While people may hold varying opinions on Israeli policies, with settlements and related issues often cropping up, it is crucial to separate those discussions from the events of October 7. The world witnessed an act of terror, and it must be unequivocally condemned as such. I expect every community to denounce it. The terrorist who attacks you today may target me tomorrow.

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