



## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

### **Worldwide Persecution of Jews**

**Tuesday, May 20, 2025  
2:00 pm – 4:00 pm  
2322 Rayburn House Office Building**

**Co-chair James P. McGovern**

#### **As delivered**

Good afternoon.

I join Co-Chair Smith in welcoming everybody to today's hearing on antisemitism around the world.

Antisemitism is evil, disgusting and wrong. It is real. It is a pernicious and destructive form of bigotry and hatred. It has long been recognized as a form of racial discrimination -- one that, through its vile and dark history, has carried with it dehumanization, conspiracy theories and violence.

Following the mandate of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, today's hearing will examine antisemitism as it implicates the fundamental rights and human dignity of Jewish people, no matter where they live. As we have long stressed on the Commission on a bipartisan basis, solutions can best be found by following a human rights framework.

I look forward to hearing the recommendations of our panelists on this aspect.

When considering policies and strategies to confront antisemitism, the core question must be: does this make society more safe or less safe for the Jewish people?

Antisemitism threatens the fundamental principles of equality, justice, human safety, and human dignity for all.

Therefore, our response to antisemitism must uphold these fundamental principles.

These conditions are best realized when society is open, free and democratic, and when governments respect the fundamental rights of all people regardless of national origin. This includes freedoms of expression, assembly, religion and academic discourse, as well as due process.

History tells us that societies that are not open, free and democratic -- where governments do not respect fundamental human rights -- are not places where Jews can feel safe.

And I am worried.

I am worried because the United States government, including this Congress, does not appear to be taking an approach grounded in a human rights framework.

In fact, I see our government restricting human rights in the name of confronting antisemitism. I think that is counter-productive and a dangerous path.

Last month I traveled to Louisiana to visit Rümeyza Öztürk in the ICE facility where she was being unlawfully detained. Rümeyza was abducted off the street in Somerville, Massachusetts, in broad daylight, by plainclothes ICE officers. All she did was write an article in the university newspaper. Our government punished her for exercising her rights of free expression and academic freedom, in the name of combatting antisemitism.

A society in which the government punishes people for their views, authorizes security forces to seize them, subjects them to arbitrary detention and denies them due process – in contravention of their rights under international human rights law -- is not a society that is safe for Jews.

I worry that antisemitism is being weaponized as a tool to attack political opponents, rather than addressed with the gravity and the seriousness that such vile bigotry demands.

Sometimes, antisemitism can manifest as criticism of Israel. All of us have witnessed antisemitic attacks against the government of Israel in the last couple years, and even before that.

But categorically labeling *any* criticism of the Israeli government as antisemitic is contrary to a human rights framework. No government on Earth should be above criticism. Co-Chair Smith and I make a habit of criticizing *our own* government.

What we should not do is shield the government of Israel—or any government, including ours, for that matter—from legitimate scrutiny with respect to human rights. In fact, that can make antisemitism worse—it often comes from people who are confusing Judaism with the State of Israel, feeding the very conspiracy theories that nurture antisemitism.

Many organizations, including some represented here today, have reported on the dramatic growth of antisemitic incidents and messages around the world, a trend that predates the horrific Hamas terrorist attack of October 7, 2023. We hope to develop a greater understanding of these trends, so that we can craft appropriate policy responses.

But one thing our government must not do is contribute to the problem.

In Hungary, Viktor Orbán and his party have given voice to antisemitic tropes by using the name of Hungarian-born Jewish financier George Soros to invoke the notion of a shadowy foreign-inspired

conspiracy. Orbán has rehabilitated Miklos Horthy, a vocal antisemite and Nazi collaborator during World War II. President Trump has warmly embraced and praised Viktor Orbán, hosting him at Mar-a-lago. This does not make society safe for Jews.

In Germany, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party includes neo-Nazis in its ranks and its leaders have peddled antisemitism. Vice President JD Vance met with its leaders in Munich in February.

When Germany's domestic intelligence agency classified AfD as a "confirmed right-wing extremist endeavour," both Vice President Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio rushed to *defend* AfD. This does not make society safe for Jews.

Elon Musk, given a powerful role in the Trump Administration, told an AfD rally in January that it's time to "move on" from "past guilt." This was a few days after Musk made what looked like a Nazi salute at President Trump's inauguration. This does not make society safe for Jews.

It is the tradition of this Commission to examine human rights problems and ask what the U.S. government and this Congress can do to help improve the situation. At times, we receive negative recommendations – as in, the U.S. government should not do something it is currently doing. This appears to be one of those cases.

We cannot ignore that U.S. government officials are exacerbating the problem we are trying to address.

Make no mistake: antisemitism is unacceptable, disgusting, and wrong. Unfortunately, it is on the rise in this country and around the world. Let us see each other's humanity and reject hate. Let us create the conditions where everyone can be treated with dignity and respect.

Again, I thank our witnesses for being here. I look forward to your recommendations.