

Antisemitism rise has me angry, scared



Your Turn

Norman Olshansky
Guest columnist

As a longtime Jewish resident and communal leader in Sarasota, I'm angry, upset and scared.

Antisemitism has become so prevalent that Jews are afraid to wear anything that identifies them, even religious jewelry. Jewish synagogues, organizations and schools, globally and in our own community, have to hire outside security to protect us at our regular religious services and events.

Some say that the rise in antisemitism is in response to the war in Gaza.

We all are concerned about the massive loss of life due to the war. However, throughout the U.S., and on especially on college campuses, the concerns are a disguise for latent and often overt antisemitism.

Let me explain.

To express concern about Israeli policies is not antisemitic. However, when people express outrage against Israel and ignore war atrocities in other parts of the world, we ask: "Why?" Is it a legitimate form of political protest to kill innocent Jewish people like those who were murdered in DC and Boulder?

These perpetrators expressed the worst type of bigotry and antisemitism.

When protesters express outrage about the loss of innocent civilians without acknowledging that Hamas started the war, killed more than 1,200 innocent Israeli Jews, has refused to release the last hostages and are using their own people as human shields, they show their real intent.

It's hard to explain how many people support Hamas, which is committed to the full destruction of the Jewish state, and to kill all Jewish civilians? (If you don't believe that, just read Hamas' charter.) Whether in America, Europe or the Middle East, the protesters are not attacking Israeli soldiers or military sites. They are simply targeting Jews.

Antisemitism is also on the rise from right-wing hate groups, militias and Christian nationalists. The efforts to make the U.S. "a Christian nation" or to turn our public schools into religious institutions threatens the principle of separation of church and state.

The First Amendment of our Constitution has allowed Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and others to feel welcome and safe in our democracy. But how much longer will that last?

I applaud the Trump administration's support of Israel. However, using antisemitism as the primary reason to shut down funding for medical research and some of our best academic institutions will only result in a backlash – and more antisemitism.

Yes, I'm scared. And it's time for others, not just Jews, to speak up and say this must be confronted.

Antisemitism and bigotry toward all minorities needs to be addressed through education, effective law enforcement and people standing up against any expression or incident of antisemitism and hate.

If you see or hear something, you must say or do something.

Norman Olshansky is the president of the Sun-coast Jewish Alliance.