

Netanyahu: Attack at Chabad Synagogue ‘Blow to heart of Jewish People’

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the Knesset in Jerusalem. (photo credit: MARC ISRAEL SELLEM)

Saturday's attack at the Poway Chabad Synagogue is a "blow to the heart of the Jewish people," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday. "We send condolences to Lori Gilbert-Kay's family, and send our best wishes for speedy recovery to the wounded. The international community must step up the fight against antisemitism."

Gilbert-Kay, 60, was killed trying to protect the rabbi of the congregation. Three others were wounded in the attack.

Netanyahu said that in light of an increase in antisemitic attacks around the world, he will convene a meeting this week of all those who deal with the issue.

Netanyahu spoke to Israel's consul in Los Angeles, Avner Saban, within an hour of the shooting, and was updated on the attack. According to a statement issued by the PMO, Netanyahu directed the consul to provide any assistance possible to the synagogue, and to continue to update him on the developments.

Politicians and thought leaders from across the spectrum took to Twitter and Facebook to express their sorrow in learning about the Sabbath shooting attack on the Chabad of Poway, a city in San Diego County.

Outgoing deputy minister Michael Oren, a former ambassador to the US, said in a Hebrew twitter comment that Israel "must declare war against rising antisemitism around the world, including in the United States."

Oren said that as the nation-state of the Jewish people, "Israel has the responsibility to protect the Jews against antisemitism from both the left and the right. It is not enough to fight against the BDS but also against antisemitism as a whole. It is not only our moral obligation but also our security one."

"We were shocked and grieved to hear of the shooting at the Chabad of Poway," said President Reuven Rivlin on Sunday. "The murderous attack on the Jewish

community during Pesach, our holiday of freedom, and just before [Holocaust Remembrance Day], is yet another painful reminder that antisemitism and hatred of Jews is still with us, everywhere.”

He said that the Jewish people will never allow antisemitism and hatred to triumph.

“We are strong and we are proud of our heritage, and our identity of love for each other and our fellow humans,” the president added.

Paraphrasing the Passover Haggada, Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein said that “in every generation they rise up against us to destroy us, but we will fight antisemitism in all its forms and wherever it raises its head.”

Ambassador to the UN Danny Danon took a different approach, insinuating that the attack was made possible by the antisemitic language used by certain left-wing members of Congress and by the antisemitic cartoon that ran that morning in The New York Times, the latter portraying a blind US President Donald Trump being led by the guide “dog” Netanyahu.

“The words, the demonstrators and the cartoons turn into shootings against worshipers in synagogues,” Danon said. “This is the time for action – for a determined war and not for weak and hollow condemnations that allow the forces of hate to revive dark periods in history.”

Acting Foreign Minister Israel Katz issued a statement expressing Israel’s sorrow at the attack, saying that “We are here to assist the local Jewish community however and whenever necessary.”

American politicians also opened up on social media, calling out antisemitism and baseless hatred as having no place in the United States.

“My deepest sympathies go to the people that were affected,” Trump said immediately after the shooting, adding: “It looks like a hate crime” and that authorities will “get to the bottom of it.”

Despite the numerous accusations on Twitter calling out Democratic Congresswoman Ilhan Omar’s recent statements as a catalyst for the attack, she herself spoke out in support of the victims.

“My heart is breaking after today’s deadly shooting at Chabad Congregation in San Diego – on the last day of Passover and six months to the day after the Tree of Life shooting,” she said on Twitter. “We as a nation must confront the terrifying rise of religious hate and violence. Love trumps hate.”

Similarly, Vermont’s Democratic senator and presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders said: “We must work every day to eradicate all forms of hatred and bigotry, and take serious action to protect Americans from gun violence.”

Another Democratic presidential hopeful, Elizabeth Warren, described herself as “heartsick for the victims.”

Special Representative for International Negotiations Jason Greenblatt called on the people to “gather and fight” the scourge of antisemitism.

In Ottawa, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said, "On the last day of Passover, we grieve with Jewish communities in the San Diego area & around the world after today's attack at a synagogue."

German Foreign Minister Heiko Mass issued a statement condemning the attack, saying "The attack on the Chabad of Poway Synagogue is an attack on all of us."

Likewise, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz tweeted his shock, saying, "We need to continue fighting antisemitism and protect the right of all to worship in safety."

Jewish organizations - including the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the World Jewish Congress (WJC) - offered condolences.

"There is absolutely no justification or explanation for such violence, and it is inconceivable that, yet again, innocent people have been targeted simply for their religion and for choosing to attend a place of worship," said WJC President Ronald S. Lauder.

"From Charleston to Pittsburgh to Oak Creek, and from Christchurch to Sri Lanka, and now Poway, we need to say 'enough is enough,'" said ADL CEO Jonathan A. Greenblatt. "Our leaders need to stand united against hate, and address it both on social media and in our communities."

"These murders did not occur in a vacuum," said the Israeli-American Council in a statement. "They are the product of an age-old hate that continues to infect millions around the world. Today's events sound yet another alarm about the growing danger of antisemitism in our country."

"History's lessons call on us as to act together with strength and unity to fight antisemitism wherever it rears its ugly head," the statement continued.

Jewish Agency for Israel chairman Isaac Herzog also responded with a statement that included the simple phrase, "It must be stopped!"

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