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Operation Cast Lead and its aftermath:
Antisemitism and the Holocaust
in the 2009 international discourse

**The Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism and Racism at Tel Aviv University, in cooperation with the European Jewish Congress
at their annual meeting with the Press highlighting the Institute's findings regarding the situation of antisemitism in 2009.**

Antisemitism 2009 – a disproportionate and pre-planned onslaught of radical activists from the left and from among Muslim immigrant communities against Jews and against Israel as a Jewish state, using antisemitism and the Holocaust as political tools.

The year in the wake of Operation Cast Lead was the worst since monitoring of antisemitic manifestations began two decades ago, in terms of both major antisemitic violence and the hostile atmosphere generated worldwide by the mass demonstrations and verbal and visual expressions against Israel and the Jews. The intensity and nature of the wave that began in January 2009 testified to pre-planned mobilization among radicals from the left and among Muslim immigrant communities, resulting in a well-coordinated onslaught which employed a range of antisemitic tools, including the equation between Jews and Israelis. This equivalence, which has infiltrated the mainstream discourse, is intended to de-legitimize the State of Israel and the Jewish people as a single entity. It should be noted that radical Muslim leaders demonstrate a high degree of mobilization and an ability to raise funds and disseminate propaganda. They also cooperate with far left groups, many of which are active on university campuses and which spew an anti-Zionism imbued with antisemitic overtones

and identify strongly with the Palestinian cause. It should be noted, too, that Jewish students and Israeli students abroad also number among the leadership of those radical left groups.

The number of violent incidents recorded by the Institute in 2009, 1,129, represented an increase of more than 100 percent over the 2008 figure of 559. In addition, many more hundreds of threats, insults, graffiti signs and slogans and demonstrations featuring virulently antisemitic content were registered, sometimes resulting in violence. Since our policy is to document cases that show clear antisemitic content and intention, hundreds of instances of targeting of Jewish individuals or property (or public property), where there was no clear evidence of antisemitic motive, are not included. It should also be noted that Jews sometimes prefer not to file complaints, fearing reprisal or doubting the outcome. Thus, the number of incidents, both violent and verbal, might actually be far higher than the figures presented here.

According to our criteria and data, the highest rise in numbers of violent incidents was registered in 2009 in the UK – 374 compared to 112 in 2008; France recorded 195 violent events compared to 50 in 2008; Canada – 138 compared to 13, and the US – 116 compared to 98. In Germany, the final reports for 2009 may show a slight increase in the overall number of antisemitic manifestations, but the community feels threatened – a major incident has greater impact than several minor ones. The figures for Russia and Ukraine declined, from 40 and 38 to 28 and 20, respectively. In most other countries, numbers ranged from 1 to 30, but even low numbers when doubled or tripled compared to previous years might indicate the beginning of a tendency: for instance, from 1 to 6 violent cases in Norway, from 0 to 15 in Brazil, and from 0 to 22 in Austria, where the extreme right scored impressive electoral gains. In the UK, the Jewish community's long-established monitoring system logged over a three-fold increase in antisemitic manifestations of all kinds since 1999, and Canada recorded a five-fold rise since the beginning of the decade. With Jewish synagogues, schools and community centers receiving better protection, close to half of violent cases were perpetrated, sporadically and spontaneously, against persons, and about a sixth against private property, far from Jewish institutions. Although extreme right activists still play a significant role in perpetrating antisemitic incidents, in 2009 most violent cases, especially in western Europe – where identification was obtained – were determined to have been carried out by individuals of Arab or Muslim background.

The highest number of incidents was recorded in January, during Operation Cast Lead. This trend subsided in February and March, but even during the months that followed, the baseline remained higher than before the war. In fact, there has been a rising trend since the early 1990s, even in years when there was no significant Middle East trigger. The origins of the 2009 escalation in antisemitic expressions must therefore lie deeper.

First, there is rampant ignorance of political and historical facts among contemporary youth, for many of whom Israel, Zionism and Jews represent a catchy symbol of evil.

Second, an abundance of Muslim propaganda, well-financed by oil money, exploits this anti-Jewish atmosphere, which law enforcement agencies refrain from countering out of “political correctness” and respect for freedom of speech. Third, the Holocaust is continually used as a political tool, mainly through the equation of Israelis/Zionists/Jewish supporters of Israel with Nazis. Official voices calling to suspend the UN-instituted commemoration of the Holocaust on January 27, or the libel accusing IDF soldiers of harvesting Palestinian organs, reflect the effect of this equation.

Finally, beyond the numbers, examples and analyses, it can be said that 2009 was a year of anti-Israel and antisemitic expressions and accusations on the international scene that were unparalleled in their viciousness. The repeated demonization of the Jewish state and its supporters as a symbol of all evil and a major source of the world’s troubles overshadows any factual discussion and leads to the implication, whether wittingly or unwittingly, that the elimination of the State of Israel as a Jewish state might bring global salvation.

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