

Insights document

Zionist Enterprises Department Canada session, November 26, 2025

Introduction

This document presents key insights from the Canada strategic workshop, held via Zoom in November 2025 and convened by the Zionist Enterprises Department (ZED) of the World Zionist Organization in partnership with Atchalta. Participants included leaders representing diverse Jewish communities from across Canada's English-speaking regions.

For the past year, the department has been utilizing a unique methodology developed by Atchalta to generate new practical and conceptual ideas to help Jewish and Israeli leaders in this dramatic era, and to shape a vital Jewish cultural and liberal Zionist identity with Israel at its heart.

To date, we have held a series of engagements—beginning in Jerusalem (October 2024), continuing in New York (March 2025), followed by virtual sessions with leaders in South Africa, Belgium, Italy (July 2025) and Australia & New Zealand (August 2025), and culminating most recently in Budapest (October 2025).

Ideas and collaborative efforts that emerged in earlier sessions are already being integrated into ZED's work. Looking ahead, additional forums – including a dedicated working group – will focus on developing new language and frameworks to bridge the conceptual gaps identified across all sessions.

Core themes Identified

We will outline the recurring themes identified in this and previous gatherings, now examined through a distinctly Canadian lens:

- **A renewed awakening of Jewish identity** - A familiar post-October 7 pattern emerged: participants described a stronger personal and communal connection to Judaism and to Israel, heightened solidarity, and increased involvement in community life. However, similar to other communities, some expressed concern that this surge in engagement is beginning to revert to pre-war levels. As one participant put it, *"Parents are going back to taking their kids to hockey instead of Hebrew school."*

- **Connection with Israeli expats** - Similar to other communities, Canadian participants shared that the shared trauma of October 7 and the need for Jewish safe spaces initially strengthened ties between the established Jewish community and Israeli expats. Canada's recent absorption of a significant number of Israelis — facilitated in part by its immigration policies — has created new opportunities for connection and mutual support.

However, participants noted that this connection appears to be **waning over time**. As the immediate need for collective refuge becomes less acute, the differing intensity and ongoing lived experience of the trauma begin to re-emerge. Many shared that Israelis and local Canadian Jews are now once again experiencing events at different scales and emotional registers — which can gradually pull the communities apart after the initial moment of unity.

- **Surge in antisemitism** — Like Jewish communities worldwide, Canadian Jewry has felt the heavy toll of rising antisemitism on everyday Jewish life. A significant portion of the conversation focused on this theme and its impact on the community. Below are several observations that emerged from the Canadian context:
 - **No space for progressive/left-leaning Jews.** Participants, similar to those in other communities, described how Jews have been pushed out of progressive circles since October 7. Many who once felt fully part of these environments now find themselves gravitating toward more Jewish-aligned spaces for belonging and safety. One example mentioned was a major cultural event featuring a large number of Jewish artists seeking, in the eyes of the participants, identity within Jewish cultural frameworks.

Nonetheless, participants including those coming from more left leaning communities, emphasized a significant **inability of legacy Jewish organizations to engage and absorb this crowd**, alarmed *“the establishment or what we call the legacy organizations in Canada do not reflect the heartbeat of the Jewish community”*.

They noted that this challenge did not begin with the war: for many years, there has been **little space within the Jewish establishment for critical or nuanced conversations about Israel or the Israeli government**. As one participant put it, *“We haven’t addressed those more difficult conversations, and we’re paying the*

price for that now. Those conversations simply haven't been welcome."

This long-standing gap has left progressive Jews feeling alienated both from the broader progressive world and from institutional Jewish life, creating a profound sense of displacement at a time when connection is urgently needed.

- **"Curb your Judaism"** - Participants highlighted a growing gap between feeling free and confident expressing Jewish and Zionist identity within closed Jewish spaces, versus the fear and **chilling effect** associated with expressing it publicly. As one participant working with college students explained: *"Israel behind closed doors is beautiful and easy. Israel on campus is scary."* Another participant described the challenge of recruiting young Jews for professional or volunteer opportunities within Jewish organizations: even when they feel deeply connected to Israel, many worry that visible involvement may harm their future career prospects.
- **Self-censorship and modification of behavior** - Another impact of the surge in antisemitism is the ongoing contraction of public space for Jewish life. Even when antisemitism is not expressed directly, the *possibility* of hostility leads many Jews to consciously adjust how they present themselves in public. One participant referenced an unpublished study on Israelis living in Canada which found that while most had not experienced *active* antisemitism, they still engage in self-censorship and voluntary behavioral changes to avoid standing out as Jewish or Israeli.

At the same time, throughout the gathering it was clear that **a strong connection to Israel remains**, including among younger members of the community — which may seem to contradict the sentiment above. The key insight is that support for Israel has not disappeared; rather, it is being **pushed into private spaces**. Israel becomes something celebrated quietly, behind closed doors, out of fear of the consequences of being publicly identified with it. This suggests that connection and solidarity with Israel may actually be **stronger than what is outwardly visible**, even as the social environment pressures individuals to hide or downplay it.

- **Antisemitism as the dominant frame of Jewish life** — Participants expressed concern that antisemitism is becoming **too central** to Jewish communal identity, overshadowing other essential and

life-giving dimensions of Jewish life. They noted that, in recent years, Jewish institutions have increasingly organized themselves around combating antisemitism — sometimes to the point where it risks defining what it means to be Jewish. As one participant put it, communities should invest in *“pro-Jewish initiatives — to make people feel good about their Jewish identity or their Zionist identity, so that identity is not built solely around negative forces.”*

Looking Forward

We’ve noticed in Canada more symptoms of what we have termed **“Jewish fatigue”**: *a sense of emotional exhaustion, reluctance to engage publicly, and a shrinking space to express Jewish identity openly, particularly its Zionist dimension*. Yet, unlike in other settings we have encountered, Canadian participants — fully aware of these challenges, demonstrated notable resilience and optimism, reflecting a capable, adaptive, and confident community, and potentially the beginning of a new trend as the intensity of the war subsides.

This combination of fatigue and resilience highlights the need for a constructive path forward. As in all gatherings, a central idea continues to re-emerge: the need to develop **richer cultural frameworks for Jewish identity**, grounded in Jewish values and a proud, liberal, and democratic Zionism. The Canadian experience reaffirmed the importance of this vision. Participants emphasized the urgency of creating accessible spaces for Jews who wish to engage with Israel and Judaism but do not feel they fully belong within the current communal landscape — and to ensure they remain meaningfully connected to Israel. As one participant cautioned: *“Israel is going to represent a kind of Judaism that most Diaspora Jews are not going to be able to identify with — and you can’t beautify that. So the question is what we do about it.”*