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Danon: I live with anti-Semitism 24/7 at UN

WZO poll shows a quarter of Israelis are scared of another Holocaust, fear the end of Israel

• By SAM SOKOL



AMBASSADOR TO THE UN Danny Danon speaks at the Menachem Begin Heritage Center in the capital yesterday. (Marc Israel Sellem/Jerusalem Post)

“At the UN, I live with anti-Semitism 24/7,” Ambassador to the United Nations Danny Danon told attendees at a conference on combating BDS and anti-Semitism in Jerusalem on Sunday.

Addressing a World Zionist Organization-arranged conference at the Menachem Begin Heritage Center, Danon said that he felt the UN building to be a “different world, where BDS is felt every minute of every hour.”

“You can’t ignore BDS; it poses a potential for psychological damage for younger generations and convinces them to not do business with Israel, that Israel is another South Africa,” he said.

“The world wants us to hang our head in shame, but we should walk with our chin up, and my message to you is, when it comes to BDS, we have an obligation to tell the truth in the face of lies.”

Before Sunday’s gathering, the WZO released a poll that it had commissioned which found that a quarter of Israelis fear that another Holocaust could occur, more than half are scared to go abroad and a significant majority hide anything that would identify them as Jewish when traveling.

The opinion poll, conducted by Midgam Consultants, also found that 34 percent of respondents were more fearful than last year while 24% believe that there is a chance that the State of Israel will cease to exist. It was described as “intensely worrying” by Yaakov HaGoel,

the organization’s vice chairman and former director for combating anti-Semitism.

Sixty-seven percent of Israelis fear for the safety of their co-religionists in the Diaspora, just over 1 percentage point more than the number who believe that European governments are failing to take effective action to combat rising hate. An additional 14% said that they do not believe that any action has been taken.

As to what European Jews should do in the face of increasing violence and an often overtly hostile atmosphere, 39% of Israelis said that they believe that immigration here was the answer, while 83% stated that it is incumbent on the government to spend money to aid olim in the job market.

It is a common belief among many who work on Diaspora-Israeli issues that there is generally a lack of concern over

the wider Jewish world among Israelis, but the new data show that it may not be the case, according to HaGoel.

“I didn’t know how much the Israeli community had empathy and a connection with the Diaspora,” he told *The Jerusalem Post* on Sunday. “I was surprised to see how strong it was.”

However, “On the other hand, it is sad to see how many Israelis worry to travel abroad now.”

This fear mirrors the fear of Jews abroad, which was recently summed up by Belgian Chief Rabbi Avraham Gigi when he said, “People understand there is no future for Jews in Europe.”

That statement was itself a continuation of a trend that has been intensifying for several years, with the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights already reporting in 2013 that a third of Jews polled said they refrain from wearing religious garb or Jewish symbols out of

fear and 23% avoid attending Jewish events or going to Jewish venues.

A further 74% of Jews have declined to report anti-Semitic incidents, HaGoel recalled, stating that the poll indicates that there is a sense of “mutual responsibility” between Israelis and the Diaspora that must be cultivated.

“Until now we received solidarity from abroad – it’s the time to connect the Israeli community to the struggle against anti-Semitism. We can strengthen the partnership,” he declared, adding that among the initiatives being prepared was a new course to train Israelis to combat anti-Semitism online and that further programs were in the offing.

Just as Diaspora Jews have rallied for Israel in its times of crisis, it is now important for Israelis to return the favor and give their brethren abroad the courage to stand up, he continued, saying that the opposite of anti-Semitism is “Jewish pride.”

Anti-Semitic violence in Europe tracks events in the Middle East rather closely. It spiked in 2014 during Israel’s war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Synagogues were attacked by mobs, protesters called for Jews to be sent “to the gas” and in Brussels a gunman opened fire at a Jewish museum, killing four.

Overall, anti-Semitic violence rose by 40% worldwide in 2014, according to figures provided by the Kantor Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry at Tel Aviv University.

Noa Amouyal contributed to this report.