Introduction

1. The Board of Deputies of British Jews is pleased to respond to the Home Affairs Select Committee’s call for evidence on hate crime and its violent consequences.

2. The Board of Deputies is the democratic representative body for the UK’s Jewish community. We are the first port of call for Government, the media and others seeking to understand the Jewish community’s interests and concerns.

3. Antisemitism is one of the longest-standing forms of hate. Sadly, it continues to this day. The Community Service Trust (CST) recently reported that antisemitic incidences this year are currently at their second highest ever level. Therefore, the Board of Deputies is very concerned at the high number of hate crimes being recorded.

4. The Jewish community is also a major target for terrorism with a hate crime element. In recent years, Jews have been specifically targeted by terrorists in Belgium, France, Denmark and the United States, and we must remain vigilant in the UK as well.

Physical security

5. Minority communities are regular targets of hate crime, and often the violence is symbolic: it is targeted at an individual because they represent a ‘hated’ group, at religious buildings, cemeteries, cultural sites or schools, because these institutions are similarly representative of a wider group.

6. Between January and June this year there were 41 antisemitic assaults and 32 incidents of damage and desecration of Jewish property. The Government has taken important steps to provide resources to the Jewish community to ensure adequate provision for physical security measures including, shatterproof glass, locks, CCTV, security training and security guards. This provision should be kept under regular review and tailored to ensure that it adequately meets the needs of the community.

7. We welcome the fact that similar resources are now being rolled out to other communities who are threatened, to ensure that all members of our society feel safe and protected from harm directed towards them.

Inter-group solidarity

8. There is an imperative on Jewish communal organisations like the Board of Deputies to act when other communities are threatened, and we would hope for the same from different communities. We speak out wherever and whenever hate crime occurs, whether targeted at Jews or anyone else. For instance, we made the following statement when Polish and other migrant communities were attacked in the streets in the wake of the EU referendum:

“Everyone, including European Union citizens and other minorities resident in the UK, has the right to security and protection from hate speech. The Jewish community knows all too well these feelings of vulnerability and will not remain silent in the face of a reported rise in racially motivated harassment.”

3 Amber Rudd, ‘I will not ignore threat to British Jews’ http://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/amber-rudd/
4 https://www.bod.org.uk/statement-on-post-eu-vote-reports-of-racist-harassment/
9. Similarly, beyond the UK, we released the following statement at the time of the Orlando Massacre:

The Board of Deputies of British Jews stands in solidarity with the people of the United States after it suffered the worst mass shooting attack in its history in Orlando on Sunday.

Senior Vice President Richard Verber said: "This horrific act of cold blooded murder, which specifically targeted the LGBT community, is deeply shocking. Whatever the affiliations of the terrorist, this attack was clearly motivated by deep rooted hatred and likely Islamist extremism. We know that our Jewish community colleagues in the United States are at the forefront of tackling hatred in all forms, including homophobia. Here in the UK, we too, must continue to work diligently to ensure that hatred is unable to take root in a modern, pluralistic society. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families."

10. Building a cohesive, safe, and welcoming society starts with discourse and rhetoric, and ensuring that the socio-political environment is a welcoming one. This is only possible when communal organisations work with and look out for each other.

Community Relations

11. We must go beyond words to make tangible changes to people’s mind-sets and actions. This means we must practice continuous, positive, and authentic engagement with people of all faiths and none. Promoting good relations between communities proactively prevents tensions, racism and violence. Steps should be taken to educate people of different faith and belief backgrounds about each other in order to prevent tensions and promote cooperation.

12. Work of this nature has traditionally been associated with faith groups and local authorities, however only the Government has the resources to facilitate the strategic growth and direction of this work. We therefore call on greater funding and attention to be given to projects and organisations, such as the ones listed below.

13. Organisations and projects like the Inter Faith Network for the UK and its regional and local affiliates, as well as national bodies like the 3FF, Mitzvah Day, the Council of Christians and Jews, the Christian Muslim Forum, the Christian Hindu Forum, and the Joseph Interfaith Foundation offer sustainable mechanisms and partners to deliver a more cohesive and integrated society.

14. The Board of Deputies champions interfaith work and we call on other communal organisations to develop interfaith structures to build bridges between communities. For instance, we set up Nisa-Nashim, a charity dedicated to bringing together Jewish and Muslim women with the aim of eradicating misconceptions between our two faiths, specifically in relation to gender and religion.

Language and discourse

15. In our digital age where access to a variety of means of communication is constant, language and discourse are increasingly an important focus when it comes to tackling hate crime.

16. Hate crime is merely the final act of a sequence of stages. It is the final, most extreme symptom of various ideologies which express intolerant and dogmatic views. In order to combat hate crime, we must effectively challenge hateful discourse and the circles in which it circulates.

17. For instance, discussion and debate over the Arab-Israeli conflict can very easily spill over into anti-Semitism. Notable examples include Jewish conspiracy theories, Holocaust
revisionism or inversion, and infusing arguments with Jewish stereotypes, such as referring to physical or character-based characteristics. Further information and clarification on antisemitic discourse can be found in our official submission to the Labour Party’s Shami Chakrabarti Inquiry5.

18. We note that antisemitic language and discourse are unfortunately present in all political spheres, with a particular reoccurrence in the far right, far left, and Islamist extremism.

Social media

19. Social media has allowed views which were previously peripheral to gain traction and reach a wide audience very quickly. In its recent report, the CST noted that 24% of antisemitic incidents in 2016 took place on social media6. Therefore, more needs to be done by social media companies themselves to monitor and take action against online hate. This is an issue we highlighted in our ‘Jewish Manifesto’7 for last year’s General Election and we have since repeatedly raised it with the Home Office and the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime.

20. As such, we welcomed the government’s announcement of increased resources to tackle hatred on social media8. Freedom of expression is a fundamental right for all in the UK, yet it should not protect people who spew hateful views. Antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred, homophobia, misogyny and all forms of abuse are just as wrong online as they are in person.

Education

21. A large part of the Board of Deputies’ work focuses on education. Despite being the representative body for the Jewish community, we believe it is of the upmost importance to reach beyond our own community and make positive change in wider society.

22. A great number of Jewish schools will be teaching Islam, alongside Judaism, as part of the Religious Studies GCSE. The Chief Rabbi has recommended that Islam be taught as the mandatory second religion, saying: “it is more important than ever that our children have a better understanding of Islam and that we build strong relationships with British Muslims9.” This change will take place across the denominations as we seek to build understanding of and relationships with those outside our community. We were therefore pleased when the Association of Muslim Schools announced that they would be encouraging their constituent schools to teach Judaism as their second subject.

23. In this context, we have just produced the UK’s definitive resource for teaching Judaism at GCSE which is going out to schools and religious communities across the country10. This will ensure than an accurate portrayal of Jewish life is presented in formal educational settings.

24. We organise Jewish Living Tours where school children from across the country come to areas in London with a high Jewish population to experience what it is like to live as a Jew in modern Britain. Most recently, 50 Year 8 pupils from a school in Norwich took part in the programme and experienced a tour of an Orthodox synagogue, listened to a Holocaust

8 https://www.bod.org.uk/welcome-for-increased-funding-to-fight-hatred-on-social-media/
survivor, visited Jewish shopping areas, and ate at a kosher restaurant where kashrut laws were taught.

25. We also run a Jewish Living Experience Exhibition, which travels the country and enables people young and old to gain an insight into Judaism as a living faith. It explains the core tenets of Judaism, including Torah, the Sabbath, dietary laws, life cycle events, festivals and the diversity of Jewish life in British Jewry.

Conclusion

26. Prejudice will not wither through law and order alone. There is a big role to play for political and community representatives in challenging attitudes that underpin hate crime. We must defeat the toxic atmosphere that can characterise society at all levels. There must be zero tolerance for antisemitism and all other forms of hate in our society.

27. For further information, please contact our Parliamentary Officer, Joel Salmon.