

Remarks in a Teleconference Call With Faith Leaders on the Jewish High Holidays
October 9, 2024

The President. Well, thank you very much, Rabbi, for that introduction.

Hurricane Milton Preparedness Efforts

And before I want to—before I begin, I want to say, we're prepared for another hurricane hitting Florida, and that's what I've been doing and why I had to push back these—this several times. And I apologize.

I directed my team to do everything we can to save lives and help communities before, during, and after the hurricane, the one that has just passed and this awful one that's about to hit.

My most important message today is for those who are in impacted areas, please, please listen to your local authorities, follow all safety instructions and evacuation orders. This is serious, very serious.

Jewish High Holidays

But now to the events of the day. You know, as the—my friends, the—the rabbis in Delaware who I've become friends with over the years, have been engaged with, can tell you, I was one of those lucky Christians who was raised by a—a Christian who was—he had—he understood what was going on.

My dad was what we—you'd call "a righteous Christian." My dad literally raised us to believe that we had to stand up for the—any community being persecuted, and he used to rage—he used to rage at dinner about why we didn't bomb the railroad tracks in Auschwitz and why we didn't—and this is the God's truth, as the rabbis at home could tell you.

And he used to talk about how we wouldn't let the—that one ship land and—with the Jewish refugees on it at the time, during—during the—Hitler's era. And you know, he talked about how it was important for people to know what happened and not forget.

And one of the things that it taught me was that I—every one of my children and grandchildren, when they turned the age of 14, we put them on a plane and I flew them to Dachau, because I wanted them to see—want them to see that no one could pretend it wasn't happening.

You go through—you walk through the gate, and you'll be liberated. Well, to stand—you see those beautiful homes along the outside of that gate, and you'll know they had to know. They had to know what was going on. And I wanted them to understand. I wanted them to see where the ovens were. I wanted them to know what was going on and—because I wanted them to be aware—aware.

And I think one of the things that I'm about to talk about is—you know, the country has been sort of a—I don't know how I could say it—has not paid nearly much attention to our—the history that brought us—but when I went over shortly after the—the second, smaller holocaust, but even more vividly seen by the whole world on the 7th, it was—it was because I wanted to let the world know where I stood and where America stood. And I saw the remnants of what had happened 10 days earlier. I saw—and the—anyway, you all know; you understand it.

But now, this event today—I want to thank you for joining this call, and I apologize for having had to reschedule it.

You know, at my direction, last week, the United States military took unprecedented action again to actively assist the successful defense of Israel. You've heard me say before that I got very badly criticized as a young Senator for saying, "I'm a Zionist." You don't have to be a Jew to be a Zionist. It's not necessary.

And the idea—I firmly believe—without an Israel, every Jew in the world's security is less stable. I mean that. It doesn't mean that Jewish leadership doesn't have to be more progressive than it is, but it does mean it has to exist, and that's what worries me most about what's going on now.

You've heard me say before that my commitment to the safety of the Jewish people and the security of Israel as the right to exist is independent—independent of that—of everything else. The Jewish state has to remain. It has to remain—the ironclad commitment to it.

In the last 3 years, it's been the honor to do this High Holiday with all of you from the White House in a season of joy and a season of pain. And that's what we've been going through: a season of joy and pain.

You know, you are the rock for your people. I want to thank you for all you do every single day for your congregations, for your communities, for our country.

You know, I know this year's call is very different, and it's a very—a difficult time for the Jewish community and for Jews around the world. In the midst of the High Holidays, 2 days ago, we commemorated the first anniversary of October 7, the deadliest day for Jewish people since the Holocaust.

And a year later, with the trauma and the loss from that day and its aftermath, it's still raw. It's hard to memorialize and mourn a tragedy that's still ongoing. Hostages still in captivity—some American Jews as well; loved ones still in harm's way; survivors carrying wounds, seen and unseen, that never go away. The families and friends left behind will never, never be the same.

I just spoke with Prime Minister Netanyahu for about an hour this morning and offered my condolences on this somber 1-year anniversary.

Throughout this year, my wife Jill and I, Kamala and Doug mourned along with all of you, including after the appalling execution of the six hostages, including America's own Hersh Goldberg-Polin, a 24-year-old last week—who just turned—would have turned 24 last week.

My administration is doubling down on our work to secure the release of the remaining hostages, just as we have freed hostages already. And we will not rest until they're all home.

As you saw just last week, the United States fully supports Israel's right to defend itself against Iran and all its proxies—Hizballah, Hamas, and the Houthis. We're doing everything we can to ease the suffering of all the people from this war against Hamas and that Hamas started.

As Israel's Ambassador to Washington said at the memorial 2 days ago, quote, "We remember the Jewish commandment that we are all created in the image of God," and "the loss of innocent life—Israel—Israeli, Palestinian, Lebanese, or others—is a tragedy." Well, I feel the same way. Far too many civilians have suffered far too much during this year's conflict.

I also want you to know that I see you, I hear you, I see your pain from the ferocious surge of anti-Semitism in America and, quite frankly, around the world—absolutely despicable. And I hope we have—we learned a lesson from our parents' generation. We have to stand up. We have to call it out. It has to be stopped.

In America, we respect and protect the fundamental right of free speech to protest peacefully. But there is no place—emphasize, no place—anywhere in America—none—for anti-Semitism, hate speech, or threats of violence of any kind against the Jews or anyone else.

Long before October the 7th—long before—I launched the first National Security [Strategy; White House correction] To Counter Antisemitism in American history—the first time in American history. Vice President Harris and I and our entire administration are aggressively implementing that commitment.

Since we took office, we secured a record of over \$800 million for the physical security of nonprofits, including synagogues, Jewish community centers, Jewish day schools all around the country.

Since October 7, '23—in 2023, we've secured an additional \$400 million, the largest single increase ever in funding—ever. And we have concrete evidence that our historic assistance is making an impact and the investment matters.

The Department of Education has put our colleges on notice about something that should be obvious to everyone—that anti-Semitism is discrimination. Say it again: Anti-Semitism is discrimination and prohibited under title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

And the Department of Homeland Security has proved—provided resources to train campus law enforcement, administrators on how to ensure Jewish students are safe on campus. And we're going to keep working to ensure—ensure that Jewish students can get their education free of intimidation and harassment.

The Department of Justice is also moving swiftly to investigate and prosecute anti-Semitic hate crimes and hold the perpetrators accountable.

We encourage you, as members of your community, to please report incidences to local law enforcement.

My administration is calling on the social media companies to adopt a zero-tolerance policy toward anti-Semitism and other hateful content, including the vile anti-Semitic attacks online that we've seen in recent days against public officials leading responses to recovery efforts to Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton.

You know, it's appalling, but we—it must end now. We have to speak and end it now.

Globally, our Nation's first Ambassador to the level of Special Envoy and—To Monitor and Combat Antisemitism is Deborah Lipstadt—Lipstadt. And Deborah has mobilized more than 40 countries and international organizations to support our new guidelines for countering anti-Semitism around the world. And this matters, but I know there's so much more to do.

And let me assure you as your President that you are not alone. You belong, always—always have, always will be, and always must be protected.

From the inception of our Nation, Jewish Americans have enriched every part of American life. Let me say that again. From our very inception as a nation, Jewish Americans have enriched every part of American life, and you're going to continue to do so for many years to come.

Let me close with this. I think about the wisdom I've learned from Jewish communities in Delaware and across the country that I've gotten to know over the years. It seems to me there is a delicate yet profound balance between joy and pain to the High Holidays.

Rosh Hashanah is a day of celebration in the—of—for the Jewish New Year. But it's also a day of judgment.

Similarly, Yom Kippur is the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar, yet Jewish scholars say it's also the happiest day because it's a time of—for forgiveness and for renewal.

And, in 2 weeks, you celebrate another holiday for the singing and dancing of the—for the Torah. You know, I know you'll do so with profound sorrow in your soul because, last year, that holiday was shattered by October the 7th.

From my perspective, Jewish people have embodied this duality of pain and joy for generations. It's your strength. The Jewish people have always chosen to find joy and happiness and light, despite centuries of suffering, persecution, and pain.

That's the ending and—of what—this—look, this is—is enduring—it's an enduring lesson and legacy for the Jewish people and for all of America to understand.

So thank you for continuing to find joy in the darkness and shine your light on the Nation and on the world.

God bless you all, and may you have a happy new year.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:59 p.m. at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Jonah Dov Pesner, director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, who introduced the President; Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Ambassador to the U.S. Michael Herzog of Israel; and Douglas C. Emhoff, husband of Vice President Kamala D. Harris. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Jewish High Holidays, teleconference call with faith leaders.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Biden, Jill T.; Emhoff, Douglas C.; Harris, Kamala D.; Herzog, Michael; Lipstadt, Deborah E.; Netanyahu, Benjamin; Pesner, Jonah Dev.

Subjects: Anti-Semitism; Gaza, conflict with Israel; Gaza, hostages held by Hamas; Hamas political-paramilitary organization; Hate-based violence, efforts to combat; Iran, missile attack on Israel; Israel, Ambassador to U.S.; Israel, attacks by Hamas of October 7, 2023; Israel, Iranian missile attack; Israel, military operations in Gaza; Israel, Prime Minister; Israel, security cooperation with U.S.; Jewish High Holidays; Lebanon, Hizballah political-paramilitary organization; Natural disasters, Hurricane Helene; Natural disasters, Hurricane Milton; Natural disasters, preparedness efforts; Rosh Hashanah; U.S. Special Envoy To Monitor and Combat Antisemitism; Vice President; Yemen, Houthi rebel group; Yom Kippur.

DCPD Number: DCPD202400893.