



Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

Religious Liberty and Anti-Semitism

February 9, 2026

Rabbi Shapiro provided the following letter to the Religious Liberty Commission through the public comment process.

January 30, 2026

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing at the request of Mary Margaret Bush, Director and Designated Federal Official of the U.S. Department of Justice Religious Liberty Commission, to address an issue increasingly central to contemporary antisemitism and to the civic standing of Jewish Americans: the perception that Jews are less fully American because they are viewed as nationally connected to the State of Israel.

The observations offered here are descriptive, not polemical. They identify a recurring pattern visible across countries, political contexts, and levels of extremism. Jews are uniquely held accountable for the actions of a foreign state due to an ideology—Zionism—that defines Israel as the state of the Jewish people everywhere. This framing reclassifies Jews not primarily as citizens of their countries of residence, but as members of a transnational collective centered in Israel. The result is a shift in how Jews are perceived, discussed, and treated.

A central difficulty in confronting this form of antisemitism is that two opposing camps—Zionists and antisemites—often proceed from the same foundational premise, despite reaching opposite moral conclusions. Both regard Jews foremost as part of a global national entity whose political center is Israel. Antisemites invoke this premise to justify suspicion, exclusion, and collective blame; Zionists invoke it to affirm representation and shared identity. In both frameworks, Jews are positioned as inherently foreign.

This convergence is structural rather than rhetorical. Antisemitic narratives routinely depict Jews as a unified political force acting on behalf of Israel, while official Zionist doctrine presents Israel explicitly as the nation-state of Jews worldwide. Israeli leaders have articulated this plainly. In 2018, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu defended the Nation-State Basic Law by stating, “Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people—and them alone.” The law itself is titled Basic Law: Israel – The Nation-State of the Jewish People. Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has similarly explained Jewish statehood through analogies such as: “Israel is to the Jewish people what France is to the French people, Ireland is to the Irish, and Japan is to the Japanese.” Such formulations recast Jewish identity as a national one analogous to citizenship-based identities in other countries, thereby converting Israel’s actions into actions perceived as taken in the name of Jews everywhere.

The consequences of this framing are significant. Unlike Judaism, which is a religion, Frenchness or Japaneseness is tied to citizenship in a sovereign state. In the American context, American Jews are actually American citizens who practice Judaism. Reframing Jewish identity as national rather than religious places Jews outside Israel in the position of a foreign national group residing abroad. No other religious group faces this condition. No state claims to represent

Christians, Muslims, or Buddhists globally as a political collective. American Catholics are not expected to answer for Vatican policies; American Muslims are not held responsible for Saudi or Iranian actions. Only Jews are routinely implicated in a foreign government's decisions because only their identity is ideologically defined in this way—falsely—by Zionist doctrine.

This perception predictably leads to collective attribution. Anger directed at Israel becomes redirected toward Jews. Data from the Tel Aviv University Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry shows that antisemitic incidents surge during Israel-related conflicts and remain elevated thereafter. In the United States, the Anti-Defamation League's 2024 Audit of Antisemitic Incidents recorded 9,354 cases—the highest number in 46 years—with 58 percent containing elements related to Israel or Zionism. No such patterns appear for other religious or ethnic groups tied to ancestral territories during periods of international conflict.

Jewish communities outside the United States have confronted this dynamic directly. Following Israeli military actions in Gaza, prominent Jewish figures in Turkey issued a public letter stating that Turkish Jews bear no responsibility for Israel's policies and should not be expected to answer for them. They described the attribution of collective responsibility to Jews as racism and emphasized that no citizen should be required to account for the conduct of a foreign state—an expectation that had, in practice, become commonplace.

This pattern echoes older historical structures. In much of European history, Jews were treated as guests, protected minorities, or resident aliens, even after generations of residence. Their status rested on conditional toleration rather than inherent belonging. Emancipation extended rights, but the perception of alienness persisted, allowing exclusion or expulsion when political or social conditions shifted. Framing Jews today as nationally tied to Israel rehashes this older model in modern terms: Jews may be equal guests, perhaps even protected guests, but not unquestioned members of the civic body.

Addressing this form of antisemitism requires more than law enforcement or civil-rights protections. It also calls for civic and educational clarity. American civics education should explicitly teach that equal rights arise not from tolerance of difference, but from shared citizenship. The United States rejects conditional belonging and denies the category of “foreign ethnicity” among its citizens. Civics curricula—potentially supported through DOJ educational initiatives or partnerships—should clarify that American Jews are Americans as such, not Americans despite or alongside another national identity. Such education should also affirm that no citizen owes explanation, defense, or opposition to the policies of a state in which they hold no citizenship.

Legal equality exists, but rights alone are insufficient. Rights can be extended to guests or residents. Civic belonging is unconditional. When Jews are framed as part of a foreign national collective, they may retain protections while losing the presumption of full belonging.

The American tradition rejects this framework. In his 1790 letter to the Jewish congregation of Newport, George Washington refused the language of tolerance, writing that the United States “gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.” Jews were not guests in America; they were Americans. Emma Lazarus’s words at the base of the Statue of Liberty affirm the same principle: the nation is constituted by civic inclusion, not ancestry or creed.

Viewing Jews as less American because of a perceived tie to Israel contradicts these foundational principles. It revives a concept of conditional belonging that American civic identity was designed to eliminate. Distinguishing and disentangling the State of Israel from Jews as citizens of other countries is therefore essential—not only to combating contemporary antisemitism, but to safeguarding the inclusive character of American religious liberty itself.

Respectfully,

Yaakov Shapiro