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COMMUNITY BRIEFING

Sadiq Khan and Sajid Javid join the Jewish community to honour victims of the Pittsburgh massacre at London vigil



Close to 500 people from Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities crowded into JW3, London's Jewish Community Centre this week to hear Mayor of London Sadiq Khan, British Home Secretary Sajid Javid, communal and interfaith leaders speak at a vigil for the 11 members of the Jewish community brutally murdered in Pittsburgh on Saturday.

Mayor of London Sadiq Khan told the audience that the attack on innocent civilians at the Tree of Life Synagogue had been one of "unspeakable hatred". He added: "Whenever and wherever antisemitism

JW3 CEO Raymond Simonson who instigated the vigil, working with Board of Deputies colleagues to put it together within 24 hours, spoke of the importance of partnerships both within the Jewish community and across other faith groups and communities.

Quoting a traditional Jewish text that teaches us that "a community is too heavy to carry alone", Raymond told the packed auditorium and the thousands watching the livestream around the UK that "this community is carried by all of our hands together.

rears its ugly head, it must be confronted, tackled and defeated. Because the consequences of indifference have been, and always will be, devastating.”

Also speaking at the vigil, jointly organised by the Board of Deputies and JWS, was Home Secretary Sajid Javid. He reassured the audience that despite the Pittsburgh attack, the threat level for UK Jews had not changed. Javid called the vigil “a sad, sobering, but essential event”, before quoting an old Jewish proverb: “Together, we will respond to darkness with a lot of light.”

Board Of Deputies President Marie van der Zyl said: “This weekend, I encourage all of you to show up for Shabbat and attend synagogues to show our defiance and pride. We cannot take away the pain of this attack, but we can honour the memories of those who have had their lives so brutally taken, by fighting for a better future.”

Jessica Weinberg-Neiss, who grew up in the Squirrel Hill area of Pittsburgh, and had her batmitzvah at the Tree of Life Synagogue, said: “This man has violated my home. He has ripped open and defiled my sacred space and it will never be the same again.”

And through our partnerships, we can be stronger to defeat hate and build community”.

A candle was lit for each of the victims of the attack, and following the vigil, Sadiq Khan and other participants wrote messages in a condolence book which will be sent to the Tree of Life Synagogue.

Among those speaking and lighting candles were the Chief Rabbi and other denominational leaders, including Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner of Reform Judaism, Rabbi Jonathan Wittenburg of Masorti, Rabbi Danny Rich of Liberal Judaism, Fiyaz Mughal, the founder and director of Tell Mama UK, Hannah Rose, the President of UJS, US Ambassador Woody Johnson, Israeli Ambassador Mark Regev and Community Security Trust Chief Executive David Delew and the JLC’s Claudia Mendoza. Anglican Bishop Graham Kings read out a message from Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby.

Read Marie van der Zyl's JC article [here](#).

Photo: Gary Perlmutter

Hundreds hear Israeli and Palestinian talk about their hopes for reconciliation at ‘Invest in Peace’ events

More than 300 people in Cardiff, Birmingham and Bristol, this week heard two peace activists – one Israeli and one Palestinian – speak about their hopes for reconciliation.

Palestinian Yasser Khaldi, and Israeli Meron Guttel were speaking at Invest in Peace, a joint initiative between the Board of Deputies of British Jews and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, with the endorsement of the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, which invites Christians and Jews to support Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding.

Yasser called on people to put in efforts to ending the conflict, rather than fuelling it. “The Holy Land is valuable to Christians, Jews and Muslims. This should motivate people of faith to help end the conflict, not perpetuate it. But wishful thinking isn’t enough, we need pragmatic and creative solutions.”

Meron said: “Getting this support from different faith groups in Britain is empowering. It reassures me that we are not alone in our struggle for peace, and that our core values of equality, justice and peace are shared among all communities.”

They spoke at Cardiff Reform Synagogue at an event held in partnership with St David’s Uniting Church, Pontypridd; at Singer’s Hill Synagogue in partnership with Birmingham Churches Together, and in Bristol at the Catholic Cathedral, partnered by the Bristol Hebrew Congregation and The Bristol and West Progressive Jewish Congregation

Following the event, Board of Deputies Vice President Edwin Shuker said: “In the shadow of the terrible attack in Pittsburgh, getting together with Christians and other faith groups in a spirit of unity and honesty to debate challenging topics is interfaith at its best.

"An attack on a faith group peacefully praying is an attack on faith itself. Investing in peace is the most apt response."

Board of Deputies Senior Vice President Sheila Gewolb attended the Cardiff event, Vice President Amanda Bowman attended in Birmingham and Treasurer Stuart MacDonald in Bristol.

Read a full report [here](#).



Meron Guttel (left) and Yasser Khaldi at the Invest in Peace event in Cardiff
Photo: Philip Stewart

Board of Deputies welcomes Government letter on organ donations

Board of Deputies Vice President Amanda Bowman has welcomed a letter from the Minister for Mental Health, Inequalities and Suicide Prevention clarifying its policy on organ donation opt-out procedures.

She said: “There is nothing more important than saving a life, and donating organs to provide the gift of life is invaluable. There were, however, concerns in the Jewish community – and also in other communities – that any change to the current system in England might put families in a vulnerable position when faced with a situation where donation could take place.

Therefore, we are pleased to have secured the firm reassurances from Government outlined in this letter. Notably, this includes the guarantee that discussions with the family will always take place, and full consideration will always be given to the views of a person’s loved one. The letter also states that there will be a new ‘faith’ option on the organ donation register, which will allow people to state that their faith should be respected if the question of organ donation should arise in the future.

This letter will provide many people – not only in our own community, but also in other faith and minority ethnic communities – with the comfort that the change in the organ donation system will respect beliefs, while crucially helping to save lives.

We now look forward to working with the Government and relevant health authorities in developing new guidance, as well as education and training, which will help staff understand and meet the needs of our community.”

Read the Jewish News report [here](#).

ACTIVITY REPORT

PITTSBURGH ATTACK

Senior Vice President Sheila Gewolb appeared on BBC Radio Wales to voice the community's support for those murdered and injured. She also spoke about the impact of the attack on the Jewish community in the UK. Listen to the interview [here](#) at 1 hour 17 minutes.

Sheila Gewolb led a vigil for 130 people at Cardiff United Synagogue for those killed and injured in Pittsburgh, organised by the South Wales Jewish Representative Council. The programme included a video testimony from the niece of Rebbetzen Rose, who was in the area at the time of the attack last Shabbat. Others attending included leading members of interfaith organisations, civic dignitaries and members of the Welsh Senedd.

Vigils for those killed and wounded in the massacre took place in Manchester, Leeds, Glasgow and on campuses around the country.

POLITICAL

Chief Executive Gillian Merron addressed the Labour Peers Group at the House of Lords on the topics of antisemitism and the role of the Board of Deputies. She was accompanied by **Parliamentary Officer Joel Salmon**.

Joel Salmon attended a reception in the House of Lords to launch UK Parliament Week. The Board of Deputies is an official partner of UK Parliament Week.

Public Affairs Director Phil Rosenberg met Security Minister Ben Wallace alongside colleagues from the JLC and CST.

Public Affairs Director Phil Rosenberg and the JLC's Claudia Mendoza met Tim Farron MP to talk about antisemitism, religious freedom, faith schools and the possible impacts of Brexit on the Jewish community.

COMMUNITY

President Marie van der Zyl spent Shabbat in Oxford, where she addressed the Oxford University Jewish Society, the Oxford Jewish Community and Oxford Chabad. She was joined on the visit by two staff Oxford alumni, **Phil Rosenberg**, and **Jake Berger**. Marie had been due to address the Evensong Service at Lady Margaret Hall College Chapel with the Principal Alan Rusbridger, but returned to London to deal with the fall-out from the Pittsburgh attack. Jake stayed on in Oxford to read Psalms for the Pittsburgh victims at the Evensong service, and joined the vigil in the city hosted by the Oxford University Jewish Society.

Joel Salmon and **Jake Berger** met Ben Vos at Tribe UK to discuss areas for potential collaboration.

International Relations Officer Marius Bischoff met Sharon Buenos, of the S&P Sephardi Community, to discuss future collaboration.

EDUCATION

Education Development Manager Sara Perlmutter visited Norwich Cathedral and met its education team and members of the local Jewish community to discuss organisation for the Jewish Living Experience exhibition in January.

Sara Perlmutter visited The FED Heathlands in Manchester to deliver a session about Judaism customs and practice to staff working in Jewish settings in the city. This was organised by JVN who supported the event.

CAMPUS

Joel Salmon gave a lecture to students at Arcadia University in London on the history and main issues of the British Jewish community.

Joel Salmon and **Education Policy and Youth Engagement Officer Jake Berger** caught up with UJS President Hannah Rose and Campaigns Coordinator Daniel Kosky.

Joel Salmon and **Jake Berger** met University Jewish Chaplaincy Director Sophie Dunoff to discuss issues for Jewish students and staff at higher education providers.

SOCIAL ACTION

Public Affairs Director Phil Rosenberg met Senior Rabbi to Masorti Judaism and New North London Synagogue Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg and the [Eco Synagogue](#) team to consider how to expand the project.

Interfaith and Social Action Officer Anthony Silkoff and **Communications Officer Simon Round** met Nathan Sparkes from Hacked Off to discuss the Independent Press Standards Authority complaints process.

INTERNATIONAL

Marius Bischoff met Ayelet Atlas Karni, PA to the UK Ambassador in Israel, David Quarrey, to discuss Israel-UK relations.

HERITAGE

Heritage and Archives Adviser Dawn Waterman attended the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain conference, held at the Jewish Museum.

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