

## **Memorandum submitted by the Mayor of London to the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Anti-Semitism**

### **1 Celebrating communities, combating racism**

- 1.1 London is one of the most diverse major cities in the world; as borne out by many opinion polls, Londoners are proud of our city's diversity and tolerance.
- 1.2 We have built harmonious community relations on the simple formula that in London everyone can express their heritage, faith and culture as long as they respect the rights of others; one of my major priorities is to ensure that such positive community relations are maintained.
- 1.3 This is the bedrock of multiculturalism – the acceptance of many cultures, races, creeds, and ideas. Racism and anti-Semitism run counter to this, and represent a very real danger to the well-being of our capital and its inhabitants.
- 1.4 As Mayor of London, I am determined that there should be zero tolerance of racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in this city.
- 1.5 Racism and anti-Semitism feed upon ignorance of different cultures and religious faiths. In London, we have introduced official celebrations by the Greater London Authority of the cultural contributions of London's different communities, including Christmas, Hanukkah, Diwali, Vaisakhi, St Patrick's Day and Eid so that all Londoners can appreciate the different cultures of different communities.
- 1.6 In order to give young people the chance to learn more about London's diversity, Transport for London (TfL) operate the School Party Travel Scheme. This gives schools in London free travel on Underground, Bus, Tramlink, Docklands Light Railway and National Rail services within the Greater London area to venues of educational and cultural interest. This includes places of worship such as synagogues, temples, mosques and churches.
- 1.7 Through celebrating and respecting the cultures of all Londoners we make it easier to confront those that seek to spread intolerance, whilst also reassuring all Londoners that this is their city and that they are welcomed and valued on their own terms.
- 1.8 This was also how we responded to the terrorist attacks in July – bringing together all faiths and communities in united determination not to allow terrorists or those seeking to exploit the attacks to divide our city.
- 1.9 Community relations are improving in London. All of our polls show large majorities enjoy the cities cultural diversity and, according to the Metropolitan Police Service, racist attacks have fallen by 35 per cent in London over the last five years.

### **2 The Jewish community in London**

- 2.1 Almost 150,000 people living in London are Jewish. Fifty-six per cent of individuals in England and Wales who identified themselves as Jewish in the 2001 Census live in London, residentially concentrated in the boroughs of Barnet, Redbridge, Harrow, Camden, Hackney, Westminster and Brent.

- 2.2 The Jewish community is one of the city's most longstanding communities. It is my broad view that the modern, humanist, liberal, progressive culture of today has its intellectual and historical origins in Judaism and the GLA seeks to highlight the extraordinary contributions of Jewish people to virtually every field of intellectual and cultural endeavour over many, many centuries.
- 2.3 In London, one of our major debts is to the role played by the Jewish community in confronting and defeating the Blackshirts in the East End in the 1930s at a time when Jewish people were the targets of a vicious anti-Semitic campaign in media like the Daily Mail.

### **3 Supporting the Jewish community and celebrating Jewish culture**

- 3.1 We have backed a series of initiatives to address concerns of the Jewish community in London. As Chair of Transport for London (TfL) I supported measures to ensure the go-ahead for the North London eruv. This required TfL granting a licence to the United Synagogue Eruv Committee for poles and wires to mark the eruv boundary sited on TfL land.
- 3.2 I met the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations and my recent Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance (November 2005) noted that London's Orthodox Jewish community has a particular need for large family homes which is not always adequately met in specific areas where their communities are based, such as North London, and specified that 'London boroughs should recognise that some ethnic and faith groups such as the Hasidic Jewish and Bangladeshi communities have distinct housing needs'. We recommend in the guidance that planners should seek to 'facilitate housing that addresses these needs to help preserve the unique character of different parts of London'.
- 3.3 My London Plan requires boroughs to identify the full range of housing needs within their area. Boroughs are directed to consult fully when carrying such exercises in order to ensure their assessments consider the full range of different communities. This includes consultation with faith and minority ethnic communities and also households with specialist or different housing requirements.

- 3.4 We have used other mechanisms, such as articles in *The Londoner* newspaper, promoting Jewish festivals, events and places of interest such as the New West End Synagogue to enable Londoners to learn more about the Jewish community in London.
- 3.5 Jewish cultural organisations were consulted and invited to contribute to my Culture Strategy.
- 3.6 We now publish a regular Jewish London Guide to Jewish cultural events in London, listing the many places of interest to visit; exhibitions; Jewish London history and walks; film events; music; dance; family and other events.
- 3.7 I supported the DASH 05 season, bringing together a diverse programme of events offering Londoners the opportunity to see work by Jewish artists from all over the world at some of London's best venues.
- 3.8 In 2004 City Hall housed the 'Connections' exhibition, documenting the hidden history of Jewish, black and Asian people in London as part of our Black History Month programme of events.
- 3.9 My office is currently engaged in continuing discussions with Jewish cultural organisations on plans for 2006 to mark the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the invitation to the Jewish community to return to Britain including a major event in Trafalgar Square.
- 3.10 In December 2005 we established the annual official lighting of a menorah at City Hall to celebrate Hanukkah.

#### **4 Holocaust Memorial Day**

- 4.1 The Holocaust was the ultimate, 'industrialised' expression of racist barbarity. As Mayor of London, I mark Holocaust Memorial Day, with the London Assembly and I have marked the day each year since its inception in 2001. I consider it vital that the horror of the Holocaust is never forgotten and never repeated.
- 4.2 It is because of the importance of education in combating racism and anti-Semitism that I have worked with the Anne Frank Trust to bring their exhibition to City Hall. We also hosted the play 'And Then They Came For Me – Remembering The World Of Anne Frank' at City Hall in 2005.

#### **5 Responding to anti-Semitic incidents**

- 5.1 Community relations are improving in London, but racist, Islamophobic and anti-Semitic attacks remain a serious issue. As Mayor of London I have worked with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) to promote a culture of zero tolerance of racist, anti-Semitic or Islamophobic attacks on London.
- 5.2 Overall, community relations have been improving in London. One indicator of this is recent figures from the MPS which indicate that racist incidents in London have fallen by 35% in the last five years.
- 5.3 However, it is necessary to remain vigilant, particularly with increasing activity by fascist and racist groups in parts of east London.
- 5.4 In 2001 I took legal action against the Al-Muhajiroun group after they defied my ban on them using Trafalgar Square because of their anti-Semitism.

- 5.5 In 2003 I agreed with Commissioner Sir John Stevens that investigating hate crimes should have the highest priority for the MPS.
- 5.6 After the desecration of Jewish graves at Plashet cemetery in East Ham I made it clear that anti-Semitism would not be tolerated in London, with the full force of the law deployed to stamp out this kind of activity. I also wrote to the London Jewish News condemning this attack and underlining my commitment to fighting anti-Semitism.
- 5.7 After the attack on a Jewish cemetery in East London in 2005 I wrote to the Board of Deputies and the United Synagogue to express my horror at the attacks and re-state my commitment to working with Commissioner Sir Ian Blair to ensure that these crimes are treated with the utmost seriousness, and to urge the courts to pass the strongest possible sentences against the perpetrators.
- 5.8 The MPS has responded well when vulnerable communities have been targeted, such as during a spate of anti-Semitic attacks on the Jewish community in Hackney in early 2005, when the MPS increased the frequency of their high visibility patrols in the area.

## **6 The incidence of racist attacks on different communities in London**

- 6.1 Police figures show that Jewish people were three times more likely to suffer racist attacks than White Europeans. Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, African and Caribbean people are ten times more likely to be attacked than White European people, while Arab and Egyptian people were eleven times more likely to be attacked in London than White Europeans.
- 6.2 The relatively high concentration of anti-Semitic incidents in the boroughs of Barnet, Hackney, Westminster and Camden (two thirds of all incidents reported), is relatively unsurprising given the demographics of the areas concerned. However, it is a matter of great concern that most incidents occur either at identifiably Jewish locations or in public locations where the victims are identifiably Jewish.
- 6.3 It is of even greater concern that these incidents appear to be directed more frequently at individuals rather than property or Jewish organisations.
- 6.4 It has been suggested in some quarters that there is a new phenomenon where the main source of anti-Semitism is Muslims influenced by events in the Middle East. I know of no evidence that anything like this is developing in London. I know of no evidence that perpetrators of anti-Semitic attacks are disproportionately Muslim, nor that perpetrators of attacks on Muslims are disproportionately Jewish. On the contrary, racists and fascists target both communities and these communities have an interest in uniting together against every form of racism.

## **7 After 7 July – promoting interfaith understanding**

- 7.1 Since the terrorist attacks in London on 7 July 2005, I have emphasised the importance of promoting interfaith understanding and solidarity between different communities
- 7.2 Immediately following the bombings we brought together the leaders of all London's major faiths to state their commitment to standing united against terrorism and not allowing communities to be set against each other.

- 7.3 These events included the opening and signing of the book of condolence at City Hall, the two-minute silence and vigil held in Trafalgar Square and the Memorial Service in St Paul's Cathedral in November.
- 7.4 I believe it is a measure of the success of our approach that we have continued to see a decline in hate crimes despite the murders of innocents on 7 July.
- 7.5 The latest available figures from the MPS for the period April-Nov 2005 show a 20 per cent reduction in anti-Semitic incidents of 20% when compared to the same period from 2004 (from 165 recorded victims to 132). I welcome this downward trend.

## **8 Representing London's communities**

- 8.1 I am committed to ensuring that my administration is representative of London and its communities. I recently published my Faith Equality Scheme for the GLA, which sets out how I intend to ensure that the GLA takes a strategic lead in combating discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity for all those who live and work in London. It also sets out my strategy for challenging religious discrimination so that all faith communities feel safe and able to prosper in the capital.
- 8.2 It is vital that our public institutions, from our police service to our teachers to London's government at the GLA, reflect the communities they serve and I am pleased that the GLA group has made good progress to ensure London's diversity is represented.

## **9 Definitions of anti-Semitism**

- 9.1 Anti-Semitism is a vile, racist ideology which has been used to justify pogroms, murders and ultimately the holocaust. The term should not be abused to label people who, for example, are critical of the policies of the government of Israel, as anti-Semitic. Indeed a great many Jewish people hold such critical views. This prevents reasoned political and moral debate on the future of the Middle East. It also obscures discussion of the true nature of anti-Semitism in the UK.
- 9.2 Antony Lerman, Director of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, argues that the equation of all criticism of Israel's policies with anti-Semitism:
- '...drains the word anti-Semitism of any useful meaning. For it means that to be an anti-Semite, it is sufficient to hold any view ranging from criticism of the policies of the current Israeli government to denial that Israel has a right to exist as a state, without having to subscribe to any of those things which historians have traditionally regarded as making up an anti-Semitic world view: hatred of Jews per se, belief in a worldwide Jewish conspiracy, belief that Jews generated communism and control capitalism, belief that Jews are racially inferior and so on. Moreover, while theoretically allowing that criticism of Israeli government policies is legitimate, in practice it virtually proscribes any such thing. Following [this] reasoning, an Israeli soldier who sees elements of racism and the denial of human rights in policies towards the Palestinians must be anti-Semitic.'<sup>1</sup>
- 9.3 Further, Professor Yaron Ezrahi, Professor of Political Science at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem similarly rejects attempts to label criticism of Israel as, in itself, anti-Semitic:

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<sup>1</sup> Antony Lerman, 'Sense on antisemitism', in [Paul Iganski and Barry Kosmin eds, \*A New Antisemitism? Debating Judeophobia in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain, 2003, p59\*](#)

'The right-wing in Israel describes every criticism of the country as a form of anti-Semitism. It is very convenient...to blame everything on anti-Semitism. Any attempt to make the current government and its very questionable policies invincible to legitimate criticism should be wholly rejected'.<sup>2</sup>

- 9.4 In August 2005 the famous Israeli author Amos Oz published an article in the Times, which was also broadcast on Radio 4, in which he criticised right-wing religious Jewish settlers. Speaking on behalf of supporters of a 'secular, modern Israel', Oz wrote: '... we, too, have a dream for Israel, totally different from the settlers' religious fantasy. We want to live in peace and in freedom, not under the rule of the rabbis, not even under the rule of the Messiah, but under our own elected government.'<sup>3</sup>

This was attacked as anti-Semitic. 'One must start with recognizing the pedigree of Oz's bias', a commentator in the US publication the Jewish Press wrote. 'Its roots lie in the swamp of European anti-Semitism.'<sup>4</sup>

- 9.5 In September 2005, at a meeting to promote a book he had written with the late Palestinian intellectual Edward Said, the Israeli conductor Daniel Barenboim refused to be interviewed by an army radio reporter, on the grounds that she was in uniform. For this Barenboim was denounced by Education Minister Limor Livnat of the Likud party as 'a real Jew-hater, a real anti-Semite'.

Barenboim replied: 'Anti-Semitic? What is anti-Semitic about it? When I say that a uniform should be worn to the right places and not to the wrong ones, there is nothing anti-Semitic about it, there is no logic to this claim. I just thought that in this place, discussing a book written together with a Palestinian, it shows lack of sensitivity.'<sup>5</sup>

- 9.6 Of Tony Blair a journalist Yoel Marcus wrote in Ha'aretz: 'When Tony Blair cites the conflict in the Middle East ("the Israeli occupation", of course) as one of the three reasons for Islamic terror, he is no different from your common anti-Semite.'<sup>6</sup>

- 9.7 The BBC is also regularly accused of anti-Semitism. In 2002 Douglas Davis, the London correspondent of the *Jerusalem Post*, published an article in the *Spectator* entitled 'Why I won't talk to the BBC', in which he declared that he was 'convinced that the BBC has become the principal agent for re-infesting British society with the virus of anti-Semitism'. He wrote: 'I parted company with the BBC over its hysterical advocacy of the most extreme Palestinian positions; an advocacy that has now transmogrified into a distorting hatred of a criminal Israel and, by extension, into a burgeoning hatred of Jews closer to home.'<sup>7</sup>

- 9.8 I have no doubt about the need to protect the civil and human rights of Jewish people and the need for permanent vigilance against the reality of anti-Semitism. This requires educating each generation in the horror of the Holocaust and combating every manifestation of anti-Semitism.

- 9.9 However, the above are examples of the abuse of the term anti-Semitism for the political purpose of suppressing criticism of policies of the Israeli government or state.

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<sup>2</sup> [BBC website](#), 3 December 2003

<sup>3</sup> [Times](#), 24 August 2005

<sup>4</sup> [Jewish Press](#), 28 September 2005

<sup>5</sup> [BBC News](#), 3 September 2005

<sup>6</sup> Yoel Marcus, '[Seven comments on the situation](#)', *Ha'aretz*, 12 July 2005

<sup>7</sup> *Spectator*, 25 May 2002; [Guardian](#), 23 May 2002

Such abuse of the term inevitably has the effect of minimising the true horror of anti-Semitism and the crimes it has resulted in.

## **10 Conclusions**

- 10.1 I believe that the GLA's approach to challenging racism and anti-Semitism by celebrating diversity and continuing to recognise and value all London's communities is the right way to confront racism. Community relations in London are improving and all of our polls show strong support for our multi-cultural city.
- 10.2 Community involvement in all aspects of society promotes greater cohesion and solidarity when particular groups feel that they are particularly under threat.
- 10.3 The decline in hate crimes in London in recent years would suggest that this approach is delivering success, through continuing to build a tolerant society where communities feel safer and can be assured that any threats to them will be treated as a priority by any administration that I lead and by the Metropolitan Police.
- 10.4 A crucial weapon in the fight against anti-Semitism is to enable as many Londoners as possible to appreciate and enjoy the extraordinary contribution of Jewish people to all fields of cultural and intellectual life and the continuing vitality of Jewish culture today.
- 10.5 As Mayor of London, I believe that free discourse on all matters that are of concern to the different communities in London is crucial to combating ignorance, promoting the understanding of different communities and their diverse cultures and celebrating the contribution that they make to our city.

**For further information contact Clodagh O'Donnell, Head of Public Affairs,  
on 020 7983 4779**