

René Cassin  
Haskell House  
52 West End Ln  
London  
NW6 1SD

Lord John Mann and Penny Mordaunt  
18<sup>th</sup> February 2025

**RE: René Cassin Submission to The Board of Deputies of British Jews' Commission on Antisemitism**  
**\*Sent as email\***

Dear Lord John Mann and Penny Mordaunt,

I am submitting this evidence as Executive Director of René Cassin. René Cassin, the Jewish voice for human rights, works to promote and protect universal human rights, drawing on Jewish experience and values. We achieve this by campaigning for change in defined human rights areas – through a combination of advocacy, policy analysis, public campaigning and education and by building the capacity of activists to promote and protect human rights.

### **Executive summary**

René Cassin's submission emphasizes that antisemitism, anti-Jewish racism, and rising hate crime are interconnected with broader human rights challenges faced by minority communities. This submission highlights two key policies that contribute to antisemitism and undermine Jewish rights:

1. *The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 (PCSC)*
2. The mis-categorisation of Jewish ethnicity in census data

We advocate for a rights-based approach to tackling antisemitism, ensuring Jewish communities can access legal protections and fair treatment.

### **Introduction**

As an organisation committed to defending the rights of other minority communities, it is apparent through our work that the same frameworks and narratives used to attack other communities are also often used to attack Jews.

Although different forms of prejudice attach different assumptions to people and involve different tropes, we believe that an increase in antisemitism (anti-Jewish racism) and an increase in hate crime is not mere correlation, but that the two are intractably related.

The basis of René Cassin’s solidarity with other communities is a sense of shared experience – be it historical or contemporary. In the modern UK, we can see various ways in which the Jewish community is affected by many of the injustices that work to the detriment of other groups.

In this submission, we are highlighting two policies which contribute to antisemitism and harm the Jewish community through human rights violations. These are the [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022](#) and the practice of miscategorising Jewish ethnicity data. This submission also describes the unique benefit of human rights-specific training and the effectiveness of existing human rights frameworks.

Human rights constitute a basic form of ethical principles by which states must regard individuals or groups of people (not just citizens). While the onus is on the state, René Cassin supports Jewish organisations on how to use human rights protections such as the [Human Rights Act 1998](#) to access effective legal and ethical frameworks to challenge antisemitism as well as other rights violations.

The more people are trained on human rights, the better our society. We see the incorporation of a rights-based approach for redress of antisemitism as a vital component in the education of Jews and non-Jews alike.

### **Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act**

We are concerned about the threat the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 (PCSC) – parts of which have already been [ruled as incompatible with the Human Rights Act 1998](#) – poses to the Jewish community (as well as other minorities and faith groups).

The PCSC is not framed in the spirit of democracy or human rights and imposes a threat to minority communities, which goes far beyond curtailing the ability to protest. The law gives wide-ranging powers to crack down on protest, whilst introducing vague guidelines on the type of protest which could be prohibited. This risks giving the police and other authorities the ability to apply the law arbitrarily and subjectively. On top of hindering nonviolent protest, the law allows the police to disrupt prayer vigils and acts of public worship. This law can be used to affect prayer vigils, public acts of worship, community events and street preaching.

As Jewish community members, this law dampens our voices not just in prayer, but in protest. The former ceases to exist without the latter. Monsieur René Cassin was a French-Jewish jurist instrumental in drafting the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the wake of the Holocaust. [The Declaration](#) specifies freedom of religion (Article 18), freedom of expression (article 19), and freedom of peaceful assembly and association (Article 20). We know all too well as a community that the free exercise of these rights as Jews, whether through praying in a synagogue or celebrating Purim on the streets of Stamford Hill, is a right not easily won. Nor have we secured it quietly, without noise, unease, or disruption. In fact, the opposite could be said to be true.

The Act risks criminalising the demonstration of standing up against hate crime. From 2015 to 2020 there were many occasions where members of the Jewish community felt compelled to demonstrate against the antisemitism that had ascended in the Labour Party and across British

politics. These may not have been able to go ahead or may have been shut down by the police if the PCSC was brought in earlier. We are concerned about how this Act may be used in future. Antisemitism is not over, and neither is our right to protest against it.

### **Census Data**

One of the greatest obstacles to the Jewish community in the UK is the lack of public recognition Jews have as an ethnic group, and subsequently, the lack of protection Jews are afforded. This informs a kind of institutional antisemitism where the mis-categorisation of Judaism as only a belief and not as a culture or ethnicity leads to Jews not being taken seriously as Jews.

Jews (and Sikhs) legally count as ethnic groups<sup>1</sup> yet are not afforded a tick-box on the census. This quirk in census data denies Jews the ability and the right to self-identify. This is not just a case of poor methodology. It contributes hugely to the unequal treatment of Jews by public services and contributes to a general misunderstanding of Jewish culture amongst the public in general.

Within the field of social, economic, and cultural rights, this issue directly contributes to a failure in human rights protections when it comes to the duty public bodies owe to citizens. Data on religion is not used by public bodies to make decisions to deliver public services, but data on ethnicity is. The methodological confusion in the census when it comes to identifying Jews causes most Jews to tick “Jewish” as a religion, and not as an ethnicity, meaning that the vast majority of British Jewry are lost in the transit of information. Jews do not pass the first hurdle of even being seen when public bodies seek to understand demographic data.

We also work on supporting the UK’s adoption of the ‘right to health’ framework (something the UK ratified in 1976 but still has not implemented), where the fault in ethnicity data presents a clear obstacle to the NHS’s ability to implement and protect fair and equal access to health. This presents itself in several ways including but not limited to:

- Jewish treatment and antisemitism in the NHS.
- A lack of knowledge on access to health obstacles in the Haredi community.
- A lack of organisational framework to screen for, and treat, genetic diseases prominent in the Jewish community.
- Inability to allocate resources based on community needs.
- Inability to recognise the increased risk of COVID amongst Jews.
- The inability of observant Jews to request to not have appointments on Holy Days.

Our submission has focused on two main policy areas as well as setting out a general rights-based approach to addressing antisemitism. The PCSC presents an ever-present threat to Jews and other minority communities, as well as protestors in general. The ambiguity of its provisions allow this threat to be dormant at times yet easy to activate and weaponize to intimidate communities and ban their cultural practices.

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. *Mandla v Dowell-Lee* [1982] [UKHL 7](#); *R (E) v Governing Body of JFS* [2009] UKSC 15

The inability to accurately record Jews as Jews in ethnicity data means that public bodies fundamentally do not understand or 'count' Jews, Jewishness, or Judaism, which in turn engenders institutional antisemitism and contributes to a greater disregard of Jews in the wider British society.

### **Recommendations**

1. An Act of Parliament should be introduced that repeals the PCSC, at least in part, to ensure there are no measures where cultural practices can be arbitrarily cracked down on.
2. The government should support Preet Kaur Gill's Private Members' Bill [Public Body Ethnicity Data \(Inclusion of Jewish and Sikh Categories\) Bill](#), which rectifies the issues in ethnicity data collection by public bodies.
3. Jewish community organisations such as the Board of Deputies should promote the use of the UK's human rights legal frameworks and provisions to secure the Jewish community's safety and equal and fair access to services and protections.

Submission by René Cassin

Main contact: Mia Hasenson-Gross, Executive Director

[mia.hasenson-gross@renecassin.org](mailto:mia.hasenson-gross@renecassin.org)

[www.renecassin.org](http://www.renecassin.org)

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