

Key discussion point: Faith, identity, and prejudice: Confronting anti-Jewish hatred

A breakfast roundtable with Josh Glancy, Associate Editor of The Sunday Times - London, Monday 16 March 2026, 8.30 am

Background

An invitation-only roundtable discussion on 'faith, identity and prejudice: confronting anti-Jewish hatred'.

René Cassin, the Jewish voice for human rights in the UK, brings a distinctive human rights perspective informed by its origins in the legacy of Monsieur René Cassin and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and its commitment to justice, shaped by historical experience and legal expertise.

René Cassin organised the event at a time of significantly raised levels of anti-Jewish hatred in the UK to deepen understanding of how anti-Jewish hatred manifests today and to explore collective pathways to strengthen social cohesion. The discussion (under Chatham House rules) highlighted five overarching themes:

1. Contemporary manifestations of anti-Jewish hatred

Participants emphasised that anti-Jewish hatred today takes multiple forms, including anti-Jewish racism, classic antisemitic tropes, and hostility linked to perceptions of Israel. These prejudices often target Jewish religious, cultural, and ethnic identities in different ways. Key concerns included:

- A widespread lack of public and institutional understanding about what anti-Jewish racism is, and the particular ways it operates as a form of prejudice. It is often treated differently from other forms of racism and held to a separate standard despite clear evidence of prejudice.
- The growing intellectualisation of anti-Jewish hatred, including forms that surface in political discourse, "culture war" debates, and online spaces such as the manosphere.
- The danger that anti-Jewish prejudice is becoming more respectable or normalised in public conversation.
- Public discourse increasingly collapses the distinction between Jews and the State of Israel, making it difficult to separate legitimate criticisms of Israel from anti-Jewish racism and reinforcing misconceptions of Jewish "power" or dual loyalty.

2. On anti-Jewish hatred and Zionism/anti-Zionism

- The current debate on Zionism is outdated and does not reflect contemporary Jewish diversity or the realities of the present conflict, leaving little room for credible, nuanced perspectives.
- Anti-Zionism is intellectually distinct from anti-Jewish hatred, but it can become a trope or mask for underlying anti-Jewish hatred, especially when it denies Jewish identity, Jewish history, or the historical circumstances that led to the creation of the State of Israel. Greater public education about Israel's origins is essential.
- Zionism should not be conflated with the actions of any Israeli government. Israel's purpose is the protection of Jews from anti-Jewish racism, not the stewardship of diaspora Jewish identity. Jewish insecurity pre-dates the state, and diaspora experiences remain distinct.
- Israel now heavily shapes how Jewish identity is externally defined, often placing progressive diaspora Jews in tension with perceptions of Israel's policies. That being said, the majority of

diaspora Jews feel connected to Israel, which means that an intellectual framework based on detaching Jews from Israel loses something very important.

- Despite the noise in public discourse, most people hold no strong views on Israel/Palestine. It was argued that this may make it counter-productive if Jewish communal leaders focus conversations with UK policymakers primarily on Israel without focus on the needs and safety of Jews in the UK.

3. Lived experiences and the impact of visibility, context, and global events

Jewish community members described how personal experiences of safety, belonging, and identity are shaped by:

- Increased visibility or identifiability as Jewish.
- Shifts in campus environments, where recent research shows significant levels of discomfort or exclusion.
- Social media, which remains largely unregulated, allowing anti-Jewish racism to proliferate at scale. Tackling this requires stronger, more coercive regulatory measures rather than voluntary approaches.
- The impact of global events, particularly conflict in the Middle East, which often intensifies hostility in the UK.
- The erosion of support for liberal democratic institutions, including challenges to the Equality Act, Human Rights Act, and the European Convention on Human Rights, creates a broader environment in which minority rights are weakened, and prejudice can flourish.
- Protecting Jewish communities is integral to protecting liberal democracy; threats to Jews often signal wider democratic fragility, echoing the historic role of Jews as the “canary in the coalmine.”

4. The role and responsibilities of government and the equality / human rights sectors

The roundtable highlighted a pressing need for **clearer and more consistent action** from government, regulatory bodies, and the wider equality and human rights sectors, but also caution as to what form that action should take. Participants raised that:

- The government faces a difficult balancing act in responding to anti-Jewish racism, particularly where it intersects with free-speech concerns around Israel-Palestine protests. This creates practical and political barriers to effective action.
- Anti-Jewish hatred must be recognised and addressed within the broader anti-racism framework, without exceptionalism or double standards. This includes the importance of establishing the case in the public sphere about what modern anti-Jewish hatred looks like.
- Policy discussions on Israel should not overshadow or distort work on anti-Jewish racism in the UK.
- Legal routes need to be carefully considered: poorly crafted cases risk creating unhelpful precedents, while “lawfare” and over-reliance on litigation can undermine broader strategic goals.

5. Practical and collaborative pathways forward

Finally, the discussion turned to practical, collaborative ways forward rooted in shared values and solidarity across communities. Suggestions included:

- The community must avoid being drawn into divisive culture-war narratives or “hierarchies of pain,” which distort Jewish values and deepen inter-community tensions.
- Instead, leadership should prioritise outward-facing, values-driven engagement, promoting pride, joy, and ethical action, celebrating Jewish culture and recognising the vital bridge-building role that Jewish women have long played.
- Jewish values, particularly dignity, justice, and solidarity, can guide a constructive role in addressing segregation, structural inequalities, and in fostering multifaith relationships that strengthen social cohesion.
- Changing conditions on Jewish campus life require a robust, credible, and reassuring communal response that supports students, prevents isolation, and presents a positive model of Jewish life.
- Strengthening education about anti-Jewish racism within mainstream schooling, not only at universities.
- Building partnerships grounded in human rights and equality will ensure Jewish voices help shape wider solutions to structural inequality.
- Developing clear communal guidance to help identify anti-Jewish prejudice and respond confidently, e.g. adoption of the IHRA definition.
- Organisations like René Cassin have an important role in showing the breadth of Judaism with particular focus on Jewish values and pride in the role Jewishness has in shaping the modern human rights framework.