



President Joe Biden talks to a young guest during a Hanukkah holiday reception in the Grand Foyer of the White House in Washington, Monday, Dec. 19, 2022. (AP Photo/Susan Walsh)

by Associated Press

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President Joe Biden on Dec. 19 expressed alarm about growing antisemitism in the United States and around the globe and vowed to fight back against the scourge.

Speaking to guests gathered for a Hanukkah reception at the White House, Biden said “silence is complicity,” and added that it’s imperative that hate, violence and antisemitism are condemned by the nation.

“This year’s Hanukkah arrives in the midst of rising and emboldened antisemitism at home — and quite frankly, around the world,” Biden said. “I recognize your fear, your hurt, your worry that this vile and venom is becoming too normal.”

The president added: “I will not be silent. America will not be silent.”

The holiday celebration comes during a spate of antisemitic episodes. Former President Donald Trump hosted a Holocaust-denying white supremacist at his Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida. The rapper Ye expressed love for Adolf Hitler in an interview. Basketball star Kyrie Irving appeared to promote an antisemitic film on social media. Neo-Nazi trolls are clamoring to return to Twitter as new CEO Elon Musk grants “amnesty” to suspended accounts.

“Today, we must all say clearly and forcefully: Antisemitism and all forms of hate and violence in this country have no safe harbor in America,” Biden said.

The Anti-Defamation League, a Jewish civil rights group, tracked 2,717 antisemitic instances of assault, harassment and vandalism last year, a 34% increase over the previous year and the highest number since the New York City-based group began tracking them in 1979.

Doug Emhoff, the husband of Vice President Kamala Harris, recently hosted a White House discussion on antisemitism and combating hate with Jewish leaders representing the Reform, Conservative and Orthodox denominations of the faith. At the event, Emhoff, who is Jewish, said he was “in pain right now” over rising antisemitism.

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Among those invited to Nov. 19’s White House event were Holocaust survivor Bronia Brandman; Michele Taylor, who is U.S. ambassador to the U.N. Human Rights Council and the daughter of Holocaust survivors; and Avigael Heschel-Aronson, the granddaughter of Jewish theologian Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel.

Also present was a rabbi, Charlie Cytron-Walker, who managed to usher his congregants to safety during a synagogue hostage crisis earlier this year. He credited security training that his suburban Fort Worth, Texas, congregation had received over the years for getting him and the other three hostages through the traumatic, 11-hour ordeal.

At the White House celebration, he noted that antisemitism was a growing problem in America but expressed thanks that many Americans — including Biden — are speaking out.

“Antisemitism may be on the rise, but thank God that people are standing by our side,” said Cytron-Walker, who is now a rabbi at Temple Emanuel in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

A menorah has been added to the White House holiday collection this year, lit nightly during the eight-day Jewish festival of Hanukkah. White House carpenters built the menorah out of sterling silver candle cups and wood that was saved from a Truman-era renovation.

While the White House has borrowed menorahs of special significance in the past, Biden said the addition was needed.

“This year we thought it was important to celebrate Hanukkah with another message of significance, permanence,” Biden said. “The very promise of America is that we all are created equal and deserve to be treated equally throughout our entire lives.”