

Testimony of Aaron Keyak  
Deputy Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism  
before the  
House Foreign Affairs Western Hemisphere Subcommittee  
February 15, 2024

Chairwoman Salazar, Ranking Member Castro, and members of the Subcommittee – thank you. I welcome this opportunity to discuss the increase of antisemitism in the Western Hemisphere and the State Department’s active engagement in the region.

Antisemitism is more than “just” a threat to Jews and Jewish communities -- if it were, that would be enough. Governments have the responsibility to protect their citizens and should protect members of minority groups from discrimination and violence. Fundamentally, it is a three-pronged threat: to Jews and Jewish communities’ well-being, to democracy, and to national security.

Today, I want to talk specifically about our many efforts in the Western Hemisphere to monitor and combat antisemitism, which has become even more urgent since October 7th. Jewish community organizations in Brazil recorded a 961 percent increase in antisemitic incidents during October 2023, compared to the same period in 2022. According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), since January 1, 2024, there have been 388 reported antisemitic incidents in Argentina alone. The ADL also reports that synagogues, grocery stores, streets, restaurants, and schools in Brazil, Canada, Chile, Mexico, and Peru, among others, were defaced, vandalized, received bomb threats, and targeted with gunfire. This is only the beginning of a long list of recorded antisemitic incidents in the region within the past few months.

The Western Hemisphere has been a key focus of our efforts to combat rising global antisemitism for quite some time. Ambassador Lipstadt and I have visited numerous countries in the region since her swearing-in to convey the message that the U.S. government takes antisemitism seriously

and urges governments, communities, and law enforcement to do the same. As part of Ambassador Lipstadt's first international trip in office, she traveled to Argentina in July 2022 for the 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the attacks against the Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association (AMIA), a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, which killed 85 people and injured hundreds. This past December, Ambassador Lipstadt traveled to Canada, and I finished an extensive trip to Argentina, Chile, and Brazil.

We plan on returning to the region this year.

In Canada, Ambassador Lipstadt met with her Canadian counterpart, Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism Deborah Lyons, local law enforcement, university representatives, and the Jewish community. Jews are not only *feeling* unsafe but also now have to take active measures to ensure their safety. For example, a third-generation Jewish deli owner shared that his partners implored him not to decorate for Hanukkah because they feared the restaurant being vandalized. A Jewish student asked Ambassador Lipstadt what he should tell fellow students when they ask if it is safe for them to come to campus. We and our Mission in Canada continue to work closely with our Canadian partners.

I also want to talk about our on-the-ground observations and efforts in Latin America. Although overall levels of violent incidents reported in Latin America are far lower than in Europe and the United States, the Jewish community in Latin America has faced a rise in antisemitism since the October 7 Hamas terrorist attacks. We have seen leaders in the region perpetuate antisemitic tropes online and conflate criticism of Israel's policies with anti-Jew hate, singling out the local Jewish communities.

Criticism of the policies of the government of the State of Israel is, of course, not necessarily antisemitic. But holding all Jews responsible for policy disagreements with Jerusalem is.

In October 2023, we publicly called out Colombian President Petro's offensive and inflammatory remarks comparing the Israeli government's

actions to Hitler's regime. Recently, I met with a top Venezuelan opposition leader who has faced decades of antisemitism by Maduro supporters because of his Jewish roots. We publicly called this out and declared support for him and others who face hatred because of their religious or ethnic background.

We are disappointed that some Latin American countries, including Bolivia have chosen to suspend or cut diplomatic relations with Israel since the Israel-Hamas conflict and that some others, including Honduras, Chile, and Colombia, recalled their respective ambassadors to Israel for consultations. We do not believe reducing diplomatic channels works toward our shared goals of promoting a long-term solution to the crisis. When I traveled to Chile in December 2023, I had conversations with high-level government officials and urged them to engage with the local Jewish community at the highest levels. While the need for vigilance remains essential, there are also signs that some are moving in the right direction.

Argentina has shown great leadership in the fight against antisemitism. In addition to being the only Latin American country that is a full member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), Argentina is also the first country in the region to appoint a Special Representative for the Fight against Antisemitism, Ambassador Fabiana Loguzzo. I had the honor of speaking alongside her and Fernando Lottenberg, Organization of American States (OAS) Commissioner to Combat Antisemitism, at the American Jewish Committee Conference in Santiago in December 2023. Their voices to educate the public and combat antisemitism in the region are vital, especially now. We meet frequently with Commissioner Lottenberg, the OAS, and our U.S. ambassadors to see how we can work together. Unfortunately, Commissioner Lottenberg does not have designated funding, which limits the reach of his office. However, I want to commend him because even with limited resources, he has done great work, including working with Panama to become the 42<sup>nd</sup> nation to adopt the IHRA working definition of antisemitism. The OAS should do more to support this fight through his office, and we've urged them to do so.

Throughout my trip and after I returned to Washington, I continuously stressed the significant increase in antisemitism in the region, speaking with local outlets, including *La Nacion* in Argentina and *Folha* (Fol-ya) in Brazil. Prior to the horrific Hamas attacks on Israel, we were actively working in the region, through our embassies and with NGOs, to try to ensure that the level of antisemitism there doesn't reach the level of other regions.

Since October, our work in the region has increased.

Most recently, we shared pro-active and responsive best practices on combating antisemitism with each of our embassies throughout the Western Hemisphere to use and incorporate into individual country action plans, and we meet regularly with both U.S. and foreign ambassadors, representatives of Jewish communities, and civil society organizations.

Antisemitism does not respect national or regional borders. Therefore, we will continue to work with our closest allies and partners, as well as other governments and international entities, NGOs, and civil society to show a united front in this fight here, in the Western Hemisphere, and around the world.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions.