

: Israel, Palestine — and Minnesota By **ELLEN J. KENNEDY AND SANDY PAPPAS**

October 15, 2023

We were scheduled to attend a meeting in Malta from Oct. 15-18 of Forward Global Women, a nonprofit organization established in 2011 to support and enhance women's peace and security in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Twenty-seven women planned to be there for four days of inspiring talks from women academics, activists and political leaders from Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, the U.S. — and Israel and Palestine.

And then on Saturday, Oct. 7, horrors erupted at a level nobody could ever have imagined.

Hamas, a terrorist organization, has sworn to erase Israel and Jews from the face of the Earth. The unprecedented murders, rapes, and killings that Hamas is carrying out against Israelis bear testimony to the determination to succeed with this goal.

Hamas does not represent all Palestinians, and we are devastated by the evil that is being perpetrated by Hamas and attributed to Palestinians.

For the past 12 years, Forward Global Women has fostered connections between Israeli and Palestinian women, building solidarity, warmth and understanding across the artificial barriers of religion, nationality, culture, and geography.

The demonization of both Jews and Palestinians that is happening around the world terrifies us — as Jews, as mothers and grandmothers, and as activists with a lifelong commitment to peace and human rights locally and globally.

A dozen women from Palestine and Israel are not able to join us in Malta, but they are with us in our hearts.

Sen. Pappas's extended family lives in Israel. Dr. Kennedy taught at a law school in Tel Aviv during the 2014 war and spent time every day with her students — in bomb shelters.

We both fear that this war will exacerbate skyrocketing antisemitism in the U.S. and elsewhere.

Synagogues and other places in the U.S. where Jews gather have added extra security. Antisemitic incidents in the U.S. in 2022 were already at an all-time high, according to the Anti-Defamation League: a rise of 36% over the previous year, and the current situation is fueling the far-right and neo-Nazis.

France has the largest population of Jews in Europe. According to the European Parliament and reported by CNN, there was a 70% increase in antisemitic incidents in France between 2020 and 2022. Over the past decade, Statista recorded nearly 20,000 French Jews who left France for Israel because of antisemitism.

Security measures for Jews in France, the U.K., and Germany have significantly increased in the past few days, led by record levels of antisemitism even before Oct. 7. It's hard to fathom such hate for such a small group: Jews are a mere 0.2% of the world's population.

We applaud the Palestinians who decry what Hamas is doing. We hope that these Palestinians remain safe and strong in their courageous public demonstrations for an end to the violence.

For 12 years, we have been privileged to participate in nourishing friendships among people who otherwise would never even have an opportunity to meet.

We are in despair over all who are affected by this crisis – all of us.

Minnesota state Sen. Sandy Pappas (DFL-District 65) is a co-founder of Forward Global Women, and Dr. Ellen Kennedy, executive director of World Without Genocide at Mitchell Hamline School of Law in St. Paul, is a past board member of the organization.

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