



# Jewish groups divided over Hanukkah party at Trump hote

BY HARPER NEIDIG - 12/10/16 01:07 PM EST

**369** SHARES

SHARE (369)

TWEET

PL

## Just In...

### Hate crime charges filed in Chicago torture case: report

NEWS — 3M 29S AGO

### Trump to tap Coats for National Intelligence Director: reports

NATIONAL SECURITY — 10M 51S AGO

### IRS chief: Agency's discussions with Trump team 'very positive'

FINANCE — 11M 50S AGO

### Has Russia become the world's new moral leader?

CONTRIBUTORS — 17M 32S AGO

### White House: Chicago torture case 'an outrage'

ADMINISTRATION — 24M 40S AGO

### Obama's monument declarations propel his job-killing agenda

CONGRESS BLOG — 27M 33S AGO

### Feds allege security flaws in D-Link routers, cameras

CYBERSECURITY — 29M 33S AGO

### It's time for Trump to explain what will happen in Afghanistan

CONTRIBUTORS — 37M 32S AGO

[VIEW ALL](#)



© Getty

Several progressive Jewish groups are speaking out against their parent conference's decision to hold a Hanukkah party at President-elect Donald Trump's new Washington, D.C. hotel.

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (CoP) is holding the party at the Trump International Hotel's Lincoln Library on December 14. The Embassy of Azerbaijan is co-hosting the event.

The party, which according to an invitation is meant to celebrate "religious freedom and diversity," has sparked a backlash among some member organizations who are upset over the partnership with Azerbaijan, a country with a record of human rights abuses, and the event's venue, which some see as an endorsement of Trump.

The Hill reached out to all 50 of the CoP's member organizations, which include groups from across the political spectrum.

Eight groups, most of them left of center, responded that they are objecting to the party: Workmen's Circle, Ameinu, Women of Reform Judaism, Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), HIAS, the National Council of

Jewish Women, Americans for Peace Now and the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Four other groups — the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA), the American Sephardi Federation (ASF), the Zionist Organization of America and Jewish Institute for National Security of America — see promise in Azerbaijan’s willingness to participate and view the uproar over the venue as immaterial.

A number of high-profile groups in the conference like B’nai B’rith and the Anti-Defamation League declined to comment when asked about the controversy.

AIPAC, the pro-Israel lobbying group that is perhaps the most high-profile member of the CoP, also did not respond when asked to comment.

The Workmen’s Circle cited Trump’s campaign proposal to deny Muslim immigrants entry to the country in and the rise in anti-Semitism that it said accompanied Trump’s campaign in criticizing the venue in a letter to the umbrella group.

“As Jewish organizations we have to be very cognizant of not providing legitimacy to authoritarian governments or to the president-elect whose campaign rhetoric included language about a Muslim registry and banning Muslim immigrants,” said Ann Toback, executive director of Workmen’s Circle, in an interview with The Hill.

Toback said that she had provided the CoP with two other Washington hotels that had space available on the day of the party, both of which had kosher catering services and had unionized workforces. She said that the conference did not respond to her.

Neither the CoP nor the Azerbaijani embassy responded to requests for comment for this story.

News of complaints about the venue were first reported in Haaretz and The Washington Post.

Malcom Hoenlein, the CoP’s executive vice president, told JTA last week that the embassy booked the Trump hotel for the party out of convenience.

“The embassy rented the room, they needed to do it because it had to be near the White House,” Hoenlein said.

HIAS, a refugee advocacy group formerly known as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, said it would be boycotting the event because Trump “regularly attacked refugees” on the campaign trail.

“Welcoming refugees is HIAS’ mission and a fundamental Jewish value,” Bill Swersey, a spokesman for the group, told The Hill. “Until HIAS gets a sense as to where the Trump administration stands on welcoming refugees, we do not wish to celebrate any Jewish holiday in a forum which is named for him and from which he profits.”

Trump won about a quarter of the Jewish vote in winning the White House. That’s about the same percentage of the vote won by past GOP presidential candidates, according to the [Pew Research Center](#).

Pew’s analysis showed 71 percent of Jewish voters backed Hillary Clinton.

#### Related News by



Cotton responds to Trump: I have more...



GOP to defund Planned Parenthood in...



Senate Dem blocks own bill over California...



MSNBC anchor apologizes over false...

Groups in the CoP that back holding the party at Trump's hotel argue the critics are making up a controversy.

"The American Sephardi Federation believes that this trumped-up controversy over the celebration's venue risks obstructing its significance," Jason Guberman, executive director of ASF, said in a statement to The Hill.

"At a time when much of the world is ravaged by fanaticism, the American Sephardi Federation applauds the Republic of Azerbaijan's Embassy at Washington, D.C., for hosting a Hanukkah celebration dedicated to religious freedom and diversity."

"It's unfortunate that some have sought to politicize the Hanukkah gathering because of the location of the meeting at The Trump Hotel," added Andrea Levin of CAMERA.

"The important issue is the very positive strengthening of ties with Azerbaijan."

Morton Klein, head of the Zionist Organization of America, blasted the groups speaking out against the venue as "far left wing extremists." Klein, a controversial figure in his own right, advised that Jewish organizations should not try to take a stand against Trump and risk losing leverage with the administration.

"It would have been terribly unwise for the conference to have pulled out and say 'we don't want to have this in Trump hotel,'" he said. "If the Trump people became aware of this they would be offended and it would harm the Jewish organization's [ability] to have a decent relationship with the incoming president and to have access to him."

The CoP party has also attracted criticism from groups that do not belong to the conference. J Street, a pro-Israel group positioned as a left-of-center counterweight to AIPAC, commended the organizations speaking out against the venue.

Gideon Aronoff, CEO of Ameinu, said the optics of holding an event at an establishment owned by the president-elect suggests that the groups are inappropriately trying to curry favor with the new administration.

"The issue is even if he was a president that we thought had run a perfect campaign from an ethical and a moral standpoint — which we don't — the idea of holding your event in a hotel owned by the president-elect just sends the wrong message, period," Aronoff said.

---

**TAGS** **HILLARY CLINTON** **DONALD TRUMP**

---

SHARE (369)

TWEET

PLUS ONE



**THE HILL 1625 K STREET, NW SUITE 900 WASHINGTON DC 20006 | 202-628-8500 TEL | 202-628-8503 FAX  
THE CONTENTS OF THIS SITE ARE ©2017 CAPITOL HILL PUBLISHING CORP., A SUBSIDIARY OF NEWS COMMUNICATIONS, INC.**