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Lighting of the Hanukkah menorah .(Photo by: MARC ISRAEL SELLEM/THE JERUSALEM POST)

Jewish groups opt for White House bash over Trump hotel Hanukkah party

By TAMARA ZIEVE, JTA
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Several organizations will attend Obama's last Hanukkah bash at the White House.

Several of the key US Jewish organizations with membership in the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations will not be attending its Hanukkah party set to be held Wednesday at the Trump International Hotel in Washington.

The party will be held right down the street from the White House, where President Barack Obama will simultaneously be hosting his final White House Hanukkah reception. Several Jewish organization representatives will be attending the outgoing president's party instead.

"If we aren't at the holiday party, it most certainly will not be out of lack of respect for our friends from Azerbaijan," AJC CEO David Harris said with regard to the co-host of the party, the Embassy of Azerbaijan.

"We know them well, have traveled to Baku numerous times, and value their country's close relationship with Israel and the Jewish people," he continued, avoiding confirmation that representatives of the organization would not be attending.

Conversely, when asked if AJC staff would be present at the annual White House party, AJC confirmed the attendance of several of the organization's leaders.

Similarly, while Anti-Defamation League spokesman Todd Gutnick told The Jerusalem Post that the organization would not be attending the Conference of Presidents' party due to "scheduling conflict," that won't stop them from attending the last Hanukkah party to be thrown by President Barack Obama.

“ADL’s CEO will be traveling at the time and so we won’t be participating,” Gutnick said of the Trump Hotel gala, though he confirmed that a group of lay leaders and Washington staff would be attending the White House event.

Gutnick stated however that “ADL is not asking either foreign embassies or other Jewish organizations to boycott any properties including those owned by the President- elect.”

The Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) is not expected to attend the Conference party either, though a spokesperson said that they would attend the White House party, as they have for dozens of years.

While the organization declined to comment on the Conference party, a source close to the organization said “top leadership would be traveling home from the White House reception at that time, and that another senior staffer was otherwise conflicted.”

Conference of Presidents Executive Vice Chairman & CEO Malcolm Hoenlein had said that one of the reasons the Trump Hotel was chosen, by the Azerbaijani embassy, was so as to avoid any conflict with the White House party.

“The embassy rented the room, they needed to do it because it had to be near the White House,” Hoenlein said, noting that the Obama administration’s final Hanukkah party would be taking place the same day.

Hoenlein said using a Trump property should not taint anyone who has business with the administration.

“You think that Trump knows who rents a room in his hotel and that influences how we represent to him?” he said.

The Conference of Presidents, the organized Jewish community’s foreign policy umbrella group, represents over 50 member groups.

Last week, eight liberal members of the Conference of Presidents said they would not attend its Hanukkah party because of its location. These include the Union of Reform Judaism, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the National Council of Jewish Women, Americans for Peace Now, Jewish Women International, HIAS, Ameinu and the Workmen’s Circle.

Some of the groups cited the bigotry they associate with Trump’s campaign in explaining their absence, while others pointed to the conflicts of interest posed by the president-elect’s far-flung business holdings. Two groups, Americans for Peace Now and the Jewish culture and social justice group Workmen’s Circle, also cited concerns about the partnership with the Embassy of Azerbaijan.

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