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We Must Say "Never Again" and Mean it!

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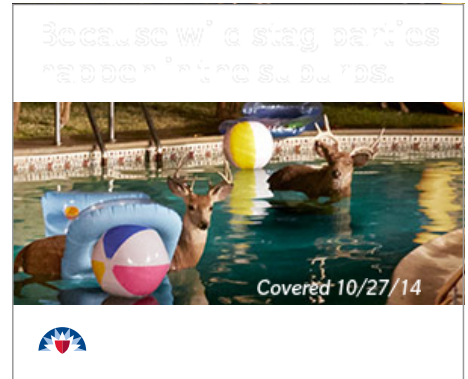
Here at the [Workmen's Circle](#), we have collectively championed human rights and civil liberties through a Jewish lens since our founding by Eastern European immigrant-activists in 1900. From workplace safety to fair wages to immigrant rights and financial reforms, our community of activists has fought for a better world.

In the 21st Century, we continue to work fiercely to remain a bulwark in the fight for a living wage for all, the social and economic rights of immigrants, the right to join a union, fair labor practices, decent and affordable health care for all Americans, and for the very promises of a better world that brought our organization's founders to this nation in the first place.

Our Workmen's Circle founders envisioned America as a land of freedom and opportunity. Yet, today, we are living in an extremely divided nation, and on the precipice of profound change that threatens the very fabric of what so many have fought for over the past century.

The election of Donald Trump a month ago marked a historic setback for all whose vision of the United States was a welcoming and nurturing home to everyone. And Trump's administration is ushering in a new government with a stated agenda that has little if nothing to do with our progressive Jewish values.

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president elect in a business-as-usual fashion, despite his two-year campaign which prominently featured positions of intolerance toward all dissent, of massive civil liberties rollbacks, and limitations of our religious freedoms? Or, do we speak out now and resist this continental shift?

Our president elect has made clear by tweet and deed that he intends to commit his presidency to a climate of intolerance toward all who don't support his extreme, right wing viewpoints. In the last few weeks, with every new administration appointment, he has affirmed his campaign's discourse of rolling back civil liberties, limiting human rights, poisoning the environment, ending workplace protections, targeting specific religions for registry, and banning others from entering the country.

From our beginnings as immigrants arriving here in the last century, our activist community has been an outspoken voice against inequality and discrimination. This is why we were so troubled – and vocal – about an event this week in our nation's capital.

The Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations (COP) recently invited its more than 50 members to attend a Hanukkah party with the theme of celebrating religious freedom and diversity, co-hosted with the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan to be held at the Lincoln Library of the Trump International Hotel in Washington, D.C. The moment the invitation reached our inbox, we (as well as a number of other organizations) recognized the serious issues raised in both the choice of venue and partner.

The Republic of Azerbaijan is led by a government that sanctions the violent suppression of any opposition. As human rights organizations and Western governments have consistently charged, it has authorized arrests and intimidation of political activists, a restrictive media environment, and violations of freedoms of assembly and association.

The event's venue is similarly alarming. It is unthinkable that a Jewish organization would host a party celebrating tolerance and religious freedom by partnering with an oppressive regime that actively violates those same principles and book the event in a building owned by and named for Donald Trump. In its actions, the COP is sanitizing bad acts in the

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H We Must Say "Never Again" and Mean it!



While we and other organizations will clearly not attend the event (and we have started a [petition](#) to the COP that already has garnered hundreds of supporters), we also have been stunned by the reaction from COP's leadership, which denied the venue choice was orchestrated to curry favor, and responded that it merely was one of the only nearby places that could provide the kosher reception. (On a hunch, we contacted several places and within minutes found two – the Hyatt Regency and Omni Shorham Hotel – that could easily have met that request.)

In the years to come, Jews in America are going to be regularly tested to make the right choices, and this is not one of them. Clearly we are not living in a world where business is as usual. We are now called upon to take strong and regular positions against untenable messages of exclusion, of hatred, and of violence. We must actively fight against intolerance and hate in word or action or accept a role as silent enablers. For us, as Jews, this challenge is doubly important.

Our history has ensured that we are painfully aware of the dangers of hate speech and demagoguery. We must say "never again" and we must know that it means that we cannot and will not legitimize messages of hatred toward others in any way. This demands that we all stand up and speak out and fight back.

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