First half of 2019 sees record-high numbers of antisemitism in UK

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A report on UK antisemitism in the first six months of 2019 has revealed a record-high number of incidents in the country.

According to the Community Security Trust, which monitors antisemitism and provides security for British Jewry, 892 antisemitic incidents were recorded nationwide.

This is the third year in a row that the organization has seen an increase in antisemitic incidents.

The group said that this was a 10% increase in antisemitic incidents over the same period last year. In 2018, 810 incidents were reported between January and June.

“CST recorded over 100 antisemitic incidents in every one of the six months from January to June 2019, the third consecutive year in which this has occurred,” it said. “The highest monthly totals in the first half of 2019 were February and March, with 182 and 169 antisemitic incidents respectively. These are the joint fourth and sixth highest monthly totals ever recorded by CST.”

The trust highlighted that these incidents occurred “when issues relating to Jews and antisemitism were prominent in news and politics, due to the continuing controversy over antisemitism in the Labour Party.”

In February, a small group of Labour MPs left the party, with several saying that antisemitism was the main reason for their decision.

“CST recorded 25 antisemitic incidents in February and 30 in March that were examples of, or related to arguments over, alleged antisemitism in the Labour Party,” the organization stated. “These 55 Labour Party-related incidents from February and March are over half of the 100 such incidents recorded by CST during the first six months of 2019.”

Of the 892 incidents of antisemitism recorded, 323 were related to social media, comprising 36% of the overall total.

This is compared to 221 incidents on social media in the first half of 2018, or 27% of the total.

This means that there was a 46% increase in the number of online incidents recorded by CST compared to 2018.

“It is the most obvious single factor explaining why the overall total rose by 10% in the first half of the year,” CST explained. “It is difficult to assess whether this reflects an increase in the amount of antisemitism online, or more reporting of the phenomenon to CST.”

The group also reported a 37% increase in the number of violent antisemitic attacks.

During the first six months of 2018, 62 violent incidents were reported, but in the first half on 2019, this number rose to 85.

“None of these violent incidents were classified by CST as ‘Extreme Violence’, which would mean they involved potential grievous bodily harm or a threat to life,” the report said. “There were 38 incidents of Damage and Desecration of Jewish property in the first six months of 2019; 710 incidents of Abusive Behaviour, including verbal abuse, antisemitic graffiti, antisemitic abuse via social media and one-off cases of hate mail; 49 direct antisemitic threats; and ten cases of mass-mailed antisemitic leaflets or emails.”

Almost two thirds of the 892 antisemitic incidents reported were recorded in Greater London and Greater Manchester, the two largest Jewish communities in the UK.

However, the CST noted that there was a slight decrease - 1% - in the number of antisemitic incidents that took place in both cities.

Despite the small decrease in these cities, antisemitic attacks outside Greater London and Greater Manchester are on the up.

“[The] CST recorded an increase in antisemitic incidents outside London and Manchester, from 226 incidents in the first half of 2018 to 316 this year,” it said. “ This included 43 antisemitic incidents in Hertfordshire, 34 in Merseyside, 18 in Gateshead, 15 in Leeds, 12 in Birmingham and 11 in Wales.

Reacting to the report, Board of Deputies of British Jewry president Marie van der Zyl said that “yet again, the CST has recorded the highest-ever number of antisemitic incidents for the first six months of 2019, surpassing last year’s total, which was itself a record.

“The report shows a 46% rise in incidents of anti-Jewish racism on social media and over 100 were specifically related to alleged antisemitism within the Labour Party,” she said “This makes shameful reading for the party’s leadership.”

Lambasting Labour, she stressed that they “must finally take the steps required to rid their party of this appalling racism.

“Defeating the evil of antisemitism will take a concerted effort by the country’s political leadership and civil society to ensure that this country remains a safe and happy place for the Jewish community,“ she concluded.

Commenting on the report, CST chief executive David Delew said that, “the problem is spreading across the country and online; it reflects deepening divisions in our society; and it is causing increasing anxiety in the Jewish community.

“It will take people of all communities and backgrounds standing together to turn this tide of hate around,” he stressed.

Assistant Chief Constable Mark Hamilton of the UK National Police Chiefs’ Council Lead for Hate Crime, responded to the record-high numbers with concern.

“It can never be acceptable to abuse someone because of their ethnicity or religion, but we see that there are still far too many [people] in our society who are prepared to act illegally, fueled by global events, divisions in our own society or by bigoted ideologies,” he said.

He vowed that the police “will continue to improve our services to victims and to help bring offenders to justice.

“It is always concerning to see indicators of increased hate crime... We will be working with analysts when the national crime data is released in autumn, to establish whether these increases reflect a greater incidence of hate crime or further improvements in reporting levels,” Hamilton added.