Holocaust Denial, Distortion, and Trivialization: Growing Threats That Must Be Confronted

While Holocaust denial, distortion, and trivialization are not new phenomena, their worldwide surge during the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and continued proliferation in the years since have underscored the urgency to address and combat them effectively.

The recent reemergence of these concerning trends, which crisscross the ideological spectrum, was initially fueled by mainly over the rancorous public discourse about health measures enacted by governments to combat the pandemic.

However, they are also manifested in other forms, including in Kremlin propaganda since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and in rhetoric employed on an ongoing basis by anti-Israel voices over the years.

Between July 2021 and July 2022, the Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM) compiled a comprehensive [database](#) of 214 public manifestations of Holocaust trivialization in particular.

The incidents spanned 29 countries, over six ideological motivations (Covid-19 Restrictions, Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, General Political Opposition and Rhetoric, Russia-Ukraine Conflict, Sports, and Climate Change), and various mediums (In-person, Traditional and Social Media, Acts of Vandalism, and Other).

A full presentation and analysis of the data can be read in CAM's [Holocaust Trivialization Report: A Burgeoning Threat in 2021-2022](#).

Holocaust denial, distortion, and trivialization are just a few of the many dangerous forms of antisemitism festering on social media. As the number of antisemitic incidents world continues to rise both online and offline, CAM is calling on major social media platforms, including Meta, to monitor, flag, and remove extremist content that incites real-world violence targeting Jews and Jewish communal institutions.

Regrettably, social media has become a breeding ground for this type of hate speech, and it is the responsibility of the major social media platforms to proactively counter this perilous trend and cooperate with organizations working to combat hate groups and protect Jewish communities across the globe.

To address this urgent challenge effectively, we ask you to prioritize the safety of Meta users and all communities impacted by hate speech on your platform. This can be done by working with experts who monitor online antisemitism, with such collaboration helping foster and promote strategies to mitigate the real-life threats fueled by hate speech.

Social media platforms have a massive influence on public discourse, giving you a moral obligation to take a stand against prejudice and ally with organizations working to combat

hatred, bigotry, and extremism. Your partnership in creating a safe and thriving online community is essential.

Holocaust denial is often clearer to identify than distortion and trivialization. So what are Holocaust distortion and trivialization exactly and how can they be tracked? In essence, they are the misappropriation of imagery, symbols, language, and historical facts related to the Holocaust -- the systematic persecution and industrial-scale extermination of the Jewish people by Nazi Germany and its allies during World War II -- in discussions on unrelated issues that are inherently incomparable to the unique horrors inflicted on Jews by the Nazis.

This purposeful obfuscation of the distinctive nature and scope of the Holocaust desecrates the memory of the victims of the Nazis and belittles the dignity of survivors still alive today. It also serves as a gateway to outright Holocaust denial, and creates fertile ground for contemporary antisemites who seek to downplay the transgressions of the Nazis to promote their own nefarious aims.

Not everything one disagrees with is the Holocaust, and no issue in the modern world, regardless of how controversial it is, even remotely justifies comparisons to the ruthless discrimination and mass genocide perpetrated by the Nazis against the Jews in the 1930s and 1940s, the worst crime in human history.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's 2013 Working Definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion delineates several forms of problematic, including:

"Intentional efforts to excuse or minimize the impact of the Holocaust or its principal elements, including collaborators and allies of Nazi Germany";

"Gross minimization of the number of victims of the Holocaust in contradiction to reliable sources";

"Attempts to blame the Jews for causing their own genocide";

"Statements that cast the Holocaust as a positive historical event...[suggesting that it] did not go far enough in accomplishing its goal of 'the Final Solution of the Jewish Question'";

"Attempts to blur the responsibility for Nazi Germany's establishment of concentration and death camps by blaming other nations or ethnic groups";

"Accusing Jews of 'using' the Holocaust for some manner of gain";

"Use of the term 'Holocaust' to reference events or concepts that are not related in any meaningful way to the genocide of European and North African Jewry by Nazi Germany and its accomplices between 1941 and 1945";

"State-sponsored manipulation of Holocaust history in order to sow political discord within or outside a nation's borders";

"Trivializing or honoring the historical legacies of persons or organizations that were complicit in the crimes of the Holocaust";

and "The use of imagery and language associated with the Holocaust for political, ideological, or commercial purposes unrelated to this history in online and offline forums."

The most prevalent example of Holocaust distortion and trivialization from recent times is the display of the "*Judenstern,*" or yellow Star of David, the Nazis forced Jews to wear as identifying marks. Critics of Covid-19 pandemic-related health measures have often used the *"Judenstern"* as a prop to portray themselves as victims like the Jews in Nazi Germany, with yellow Stars of David appearing at many demonstrations across the globe and countless social media posts since the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020.

Mock concentration camp uniforms are also used in a similar manner, such as by an anti-vaccine activist who marched around a main intersection in Melbourne, Australia, in striped pajamas carrying a sign reading, "History repeats."

Meanwhile, city council and school board meetings across the United States saw participants perform Nazi salutes during debates on mask mandates.

Infamous phrases, such as "*Arbeit macht frei*" (or "Work sets you free") from the Auschwitz death camp gate, are also used to denounce pandemic-related health measures.

Furthermore, government officials, such as Dr. Anthony Fauci in the United States, are frequently compared to Nazi leaders. For example, in November 2021, then-*Fox Nation* host Lara Logan said Fauci "represents Joseph Mengele, the Nazi doctor who did experiments on Jews during the Second World War and in the concentration camps."

Among anti-Israel activists, Holocaust distortion and trivialization have become increasingly pervasive means of defaming and delegitimizing the Jewish state. During May 2021's flare-up of Israel-Gaza violence, social media sites were awash with comparisons of Israel to the Nazis and Gaza to Auschwitz, with variations of the phrase "Hitler was right," among others, spreading rapidly online.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has regularly engaged in this tactic as well. Last year, he accused Israel of perpetrating "50 Holocausts" against the Palestinians since 1947, and just this past month he claimed that Nazi leader Adolf Hitler targeted the Jewish people for extermination because of "their social role, and not their religion."

Holocaust distortion and trivialization have seeped into other realms as well, with activists at the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference in Scotland referring to climate change as an "environmental holocaust." And a disturbing TikTok fad the previous year popularized teenagers pretending to be Holocaust victims.

Over the past year and a half, a steady stream of propaganda emanating from top officials in Moscow has baselessly sought to portray Ukraine as a hotbed of neo-Nazism, with "de-Nazification" of the country often cited as one of the goals of Russia's continuing invasion.

Action must be taken to stop these intolerable and dangerous trends. This is why CAM launched in 2022 the #CantBeCompared campaign against the normalization of Holocaust distortion and trivialization, urging international, national, and local authorities to treat them as hate speech and combat it as such, and imploring major social media networks and other internet companies to include them in their anti-hate policies.

Time and again, history has proven how quickly bigoted words can turn into antisemitic violence. When Jews are threatened, societies as a whole are weakened, with disastrous consequences. To ensure the grim lessons of the past have been learned, good people of conscience of all backgrounds must stand together and uphold the most basic moral principles by firmly condemning and acting against Holocaust denial, distortion, and trivialization.