

# ‘This Is Not My Canada Anymore. We’re Experiencing an Unprecedented Assault on the Jewish Community’

**Veteran human rights warrior Karen Mock is in despair over Canadian reactions to the Israel-Hamas war. Jewish people ‘are feeling fear, pain, anxiety and uncertainty about the future – not to mention betrayed by our allies,’ she says**



**A mother and daughter embracing at a vigil in Ottawa last month for the Israelis held hostage by Hamas. Credit: Dave Chan / AFP**

[Judy Maltz](#) Nov 23, 2023

NEW YORK – For more than half a century, Karen Mock has devoted herself to fighting racism and antisemitism in Canada, taking the view that irrational hate can best be overcome through people-to-people encounters. Accordingly, a key focus of her efforts has been creating and strengthening bridges between the local Jewish and Muslim communities.

“I’d call that my life’s works,” says the petite, energetic educational psychologist.

Among the numerous positions she has filled are executive director of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, national director of the League for Human Rights of B’nai B’rith Canada and chair of the Canadian Multiculturalism Advisory Committee, as well as founding member of the Canadian Association of Jews and Muslims and the Canadian Arab/Jewish Leadership Dialogue.



Although she officially retired quite a few years ago, Mock hasn’t stopped working. Until not that long ago, she served as president of liberal Zionist organization JSpace Canada. Today, at 78, she continues to serve as chair of the board of the Pearson Centre for Progressive Policy, an Ottawa-based think tank, and as a founding board member of Enhancing Social Justice Education, a Toronto-based group of volunteer educators working “to reintroduce the pressing reality of antisemitism as a critical dimension of social justice education.”

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To be sure, there have been setbacks in her long career as a warrior against hate. A particular low point, she recalls, came in 2001 at the notorious anti-racism conference held in Durban, where [the vilification of Israel](#) assumed blatantly antisemitic tones.



**Police cars in front of Talmud Torah Elementary School in Montreal earlier this month. Two Jewish schools in the city were hit by gunfire the previous evening. Credit: Mathiew Leiser / AFP**

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**Karen Mock**

“Who would have believed that this would be happening, of all places, in Canada, which has been an innovator of concepts like multiculturalism and shared society for all?” she asks. “The worst thing about it is that all the efforts Jews like me have put into fighting racism and oppression, while promoting equity, diversity and inclusion, is now being turned against us.

“The same educators who have no trouble labeling racism against Blacks or Asians cannot, for whatever reason, call it antisemitism when a Jewish restaurant is boycotted here. They call it a political protest instead. Well, I say no. If you want to make a political protest, you go to the Israeli Embassy and stand outside there. That’s a political protest. And it’s mind-boggling that I have to explain this to so-called human rights activists and social justice educators.”



**Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaking during the Antisemitism: Face It, Fight It conference in Ottawa, Ontario, last month.**

Credit: Justin Tang/AP

Mock, who believes the problem “has been brewing for years,” puts much of the blame on the educational system, which has not been willing to invest the time and resources required, she says, to make teachers and students understand that there are no “ifs” and “buts” when it comes to the world’s oldest hatred.

Last week, Mock notes by way of example, she and a colleague were invited to conduct a training session on [antisemitism](#) at a local school.

“They told us all we had was an hour,” she relays. “How could we possibly have the conversations that needed to be had in just an hour? And how could we possibly fight all the propaganda that these kids and teachers have been subjected to in just an hour? But today it’s all about quick fixes. You’re either with us or against us, and that’s why people feel forced to take sides.”



**Placards placed by pro-Palestinian supporters in the constituent office of Canada's Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, in Toronto last month. Credit: Arlyn McAdorey/Reuters**

Some of the people closest to her, she confides, have been advising her to just give up. “‘Karen,’ they tell me, ‘what you’re doing – it’s just like pissing in the wind.’”

But raising her hands, she says, would go against her very nature. “Maybe I’m still too much of an optimist, but I don’t believe in giving up,” she says.

“It’s like the famous saying from Pirkei Avot I like to quote in my workshops: It’s not for you to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist.”