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IU Hillel Memorial Service and Vigil
for the Victims of the Tree of Life Synagogue Shooting
Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie
President, Indiana University
Helene G. Simon Hillel Center
730 E. 3rd St
Monday, October 29, 2018
7:00 p.m.

1. SYMPATHIES TO THE FAMILIES OF THE VICTIMS OF THE MASSACRE AT TREE
OF LIFE SYNAGOGUE

Thank you, Rabbi Sue.

I want to begin by expressing, on behalf of the entire Indiana University community, our deepest sympathies to the families and loved ones of the victims of this weekend's horrific massacre at the Tree of Life Synagogue. Our thoughts are with the members of the congregation, the four wounded police officers who courageously helped subdue the shooter, the Pittsburgh Jewish community, and the residents of the city.

In the words of my colleague, Patrick Gallagher, chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh: "These acts of hate and terror contradict every human value that we hold dear ...and we stand united with all of those impacted."¹

In memory of the victims of this appalling act of violence, Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb has ordered all flags to be flown at half-staff.

¹ Patrick Gallagher, Statement on the Tragedy at Tree of Life Synagogue, University of Pittsburgh, Web, Accessed October 28, 2018, URL: <https://pitt.edu/pitt-cares-resources>.

It is also essential in the wake of such an incident, to renounce it in no uncertain terms for what it truly is—an act of bigoted antisemitism, an act of violent extremism, and plainly and simply, a hate crime.

2. REDOUBLING OUR EFFORTS TO CREATE A DIVERSE, TOLERANT, INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

The increasing frequency with which acts of hate-driven violence are occurring in the United States is an ongoing national tragedy. Studies show that the number of such hate groups continues to grow.

Last week, in a suburb of Louisville, Kentucky, a man murdered two African Americans in a grocery store just minutes after attempting to enter a predominantly black church.

Last week, a Florida man also known for his vitriolic threatening social media posts like the perpetrator of the Pittsburgh massacre, was arrested for mailing homemade bombs to political leaders and public figures who hold different political views.

Last year, during the summer, a serving Congressman and three others were wounded in a politically-motivated shooting at a charity Congressional baseball game.

Last year in Charlottesville, Virginia, at a violent rally of white supremacists, a man drove a car into a crowd of counter-protesters, killing one woman and injuring many others.

And this week, Matthew Shepard, who was tortured and left to die on a lonely fencepost in Wyoming 20 years ago, was at long last laid to rest in the National Cathedral in Washington. His murder is a sad reminder of a history of violence against members of the LGBTQ community.

But, perhaps most dreadfully, this weekend's despicable massacre at a house of worship also, sadly, brings to mind the 2015 mass shooting in a historic black church in Charleston, South Carolina.

"It is simply unconscionable..." in the words of Anti-Defamation League President Jonathan Greenblatt, "... for Jews to be targeted during worship on a Sabbath morning..." to which I would add a worship service in a church on Sunday morning or one in a mosque—and he continues that it is "... unthinkable that it would happen in the United States of America in this day and age."²

All too often, the increasing outbreaks of antisemitism worldwide, in this country, and—almost unbelievably—on American college campuses, are met with silence. But we cannot ignore or forget the dreadful lesson of recent history: that we cannot and we must not hide from our responsibility as a community to confront and to condemn such acts of antisemitism and all forms of hatred whenever and wherever we find them.

Likewise, we must raise our voices and condemn acts of hatred and violence against any group. The ugly and tragic history of failing to do so stands as a stark reminder that this responsibility rests with each of us individually and with all of us collectively. Violent acts motivated by hatred against groups are—wherever they occur—matters of deep concern because criminal acts of hatred against any group threaten the freedom of all people.

In this environment, it is also more important than ever that all of us at Indiana University redouble our efforts to create a diverse, tolerant, and inclusive community—on our campuses, and in our society as a whole.

² Jonathan A. Greenblatt, "ADL Statement on Synagogue Shooting in Pittsburgh," Web, Accessed October 28, 2018, URL: <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-statement-on-synagogue-shooting-in-pittsburgh>.

We must make every effort—and not just in the wake of horrific crimes like these—to ensure that inclusive diversity is one of the cardinal virtues of our community. In a diverse and increasingly global society, we absolutely depend on tolerance and respect for people, without regard to race, religion, national origin, citizenship status, sex, gender identity or expression, or sexual orientation.

3. INDIANA UNIVERSITY HILLEL: A BEACON OF LIGHT AND UNDERSTANDING

Indiana University remains absolutely steadfast in its commitment to helping to create a safe and welcoming environment for the members of IU's and Bloomington's vibrant Jewish community. Organizations like Hillel, Congregation Beth Shalom, the Borns Jewish Studies Program, and Chabad House contribute to the intellectual life and culture of Indiana University in countless ways.

For this, all of us are enormously grateful, and we stand in solidarity with IU Hillel tonight as we mourn the victims of the tragedy in Pittsburgh, and as we stand together in our commitment to building a more tolerant community and a more tolerant society.

Thank you very much.