JERUSALEM — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday rejected international pressure to halt the war in Gaza in a fiery speech marking the country’s annual Holocaust memorial day, declaring: “If Israel is forced to stand alone, Israel will stand alone.”

The message, delivered in a setting that typically avoids ***politics***, was aimed at the growing chorus of world leaders who have criticized the heavy toll caused by Israel’s military offensive against Hamas militants and have urged the sides to agree to a cease-fire.

Netanyahu has said he is open to a deal that would pause nearly seven months of fighting and bring home hostages held by Hamas. But he also says he remains committed to an invasion of the [*southern Gaza city of Rafah*](https://apnews.com/article/rafah-offensive-israel-netanyahu-hamas-palestinians-014b2d850bbe28897b624bc5e5378320), despite widespread international opposition because of the more than 1 million civilians huddled there.

“I say to the leaders of the world: No amount of pressure, no decision by any international forum will stop Israel from defending itself,” he said, speaking in English. “Never again is now.”

Yom Hashoah, the day Israel observes as a memorial for the 6 million Jews killed by Nazi Germany and its allies in the Holocaust, is one of the most solemn dates on the country’s calendar. Speeches at the ceremony generally avoid ***politics***, though Netanyahu in recent years has used the occasion to lash out at Israel's archenemy Iran.

The ceremony ushered in Israel’s first Holocaust remembrance day since the Oct. 7 Hamas attack that sparked the war, imbuing the already somber day with additional meaning.

Hamas militants killed some 1,200 people in the attack, making it the deadliest violence against Jews since the Holocaust.

Israel responded with an air and ground offensive in Gaza, where the death toll has soared to more than 34,500 people, according to local health officials, and about 80% of Gaza’s 2.3 million people are displaced. The death and destruction has prompted South Africa to file a [*genocide case against Israel*](https://apnews.com/article/world-court-israel-genocide-gaza-south-africa-774ab3c3d57fd7bcc627602eaf47fd98) in the U.N.’s world court. Israel [*strongly rejects the charges*](https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-genocide-un-court-south-africa-7bb753a4c39e1a11ae593d4c72ff129a).

On Sunday, Netanyahu attacked those accusing Israel of carrying out a genocide against the Palestinians, claiming that Israel was doing everything possible to ensure the entry of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip.

The 24-hour memorial period began after sundown on Sunday with a ceremony at Yad Vashem, Israel’s national Holocaust memorial, in Jerusalem.

There are approximately 245,000 living Holocaust survivors around the world, according to the Claims Conference, an organization that negotiates for material compensation for Holocaust survivors. Approximately half of the survivors live in Israel.

On Sunday, Tel Aviv University and the Anti-Defamation League released an annual Antisemitism Worldwide Report for 2023, which found a sharp increase in antisemitic attacks globally.

It said the number of antisemitic incidents in the United States doubled, from 3,697 in 2022 to 7,523 in 2023.

While most of these incidents occurred after the war erupted in October, the number of antisemitic incidents, which include vandalism, harassment, assault, and bomb threats, from January to September was already significantly higher than the previous year.

The report found an average of three bomb threats per day at synagogues and Jewish institutions in the U.S., more than 10 times the number in 2022.

Other countries tracked similar rises in antisemitic incidents. In France, the number nearly quadrupled, from 436 in 2022 to 1,676 in 2023, while it more than doubled in the United Kingdom and Canada.

“In the aftermath of the October 7 war crimes committed by Hamas, the world has seen the worst wave of antisemitic incidents since the end of the Second World War,” the report stated.

Netanyahu also compared the recent wave of protests on American campuses to German universities in the 1930s, in the runup to the Holocaust. He condemned the “explosion of a volcano of antisemitism spitting out boiling lava of lies against us around the world.”

Nearly 2,500 [*students have been arrested*](https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestine-gaza-war-universities-campus-protests-3afafc2d56c6dc87635549475d94e1d6) in a wave of protests at U.S. college campuses, while there have been smaller protests in other countries, [*including France*](https://apnews.com/article/france-student-protests-israel-palestinians-gaza-0ec592621be4ac2d40ded1c4297314e1). Protesters reject antisemitism accusations and say they are criticizing Israel. Campuses and the federal government are [*struggling to define*](https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinian-campus-protests-columbia-congress-df4ba95dae844b3a8559b4b3ad7e058a) exactly where political speech crosses into antisemitism.