

Testimony by Viviane Teitelbaum, Secretary General of the Jonathas Institute, on behalf of the four civil parties before the Ghent court, on 12 December 2025

Your Honour,

I am speaking here as a citizen who still believes in the justice of her country, and I am doing so on behalf of the civil parties: the CCOJB, the FJO, the Jonathas Institute, and the CCLJ.

Because many Jews in our country today no longer feel safe and feel that they no longer have a future in Belgium.

Not only because of incitement to hatred, as in the remarks made by Herman Brusselmans, and not only because these words can lead to the worst and have an extremely harmful influence on individuals.

But because many Jews feel abandoned by their country's judicial system, especially when a prosecutor himself requests that the case be dismissed.

Because anti-Semitic threats and acts inciting hatred are far too often dismissed without further action. And unfortunately, as the daughter of a hidden child, from a destroyed family, I have experienced this too often.

We have already seen our justice system's indifference towards Jews in other eras.

You are faced with history, and unfortunately, you may not fully appreciate its significance. I would like to say to you, ladies and gentlemen of the court, that we are living in serious times, that history is accelerating—for the worse.

I would like to remind you of the era of democratic Weimar Germany, when the Nazi party received only 5% of the vote and well-meaning judges refrained from condemning the authors of anti-Semitic texts and jokes, in the name of freedom of expression, or out of cowardice, or indifference.

Jewish leaders failed to make their voices heard or to lead the fight against anti-Semitism.

In the 1920s, the German judicial system refused to consider anti-Semitism a threat.

I hope—we hope—that this is not the case today in Belgium.

In many ways, we are the worthy heirs of those Jews who, like us today, tried to make their fellow citizens understand that it all starts with comments aimed solely at Jews, but that it ends up targeting society as a whole.

All incitement to hatred, all racist crimes begin with the words of intellectuals or comedians. But words can be deadly.

Because he was furious about the war in the Middle East, Herman Brusselmans wrote that he wanted to “stick a sharp knife in the throat of every Jew.” Allow me to make one more point: Mr. Brusselmans did indeed talk about sticking a knife in the throat of every Jew. He did not refer to Israelis, or even “Zionists.” He explicitly used the word “Jew.”

You will no doubt remember what we were constantly reminded of—and rightly so—after the attacks in New York, Paris, and Zaventem: no generalizations. Let's not stigmatize all Muslims in the United States, France, or Belgium. Yet that is precisely what this writer is doing today, with a pen dipped in Nazi-inspired ink: he is targeting all Jews.

In other words, when it comes to Jews, generalization is permissible. That is also the question I am asking you today.

It is 2025, and Jews are full citizens. Our democracy and the justice system of our country must protect us from hate speech and attacks.

The editors of Humo acknowledged an error of judgment in publishing a controversial column. Without apologizing to Jews, the text has since been removed from the website. Why? Because these comments were hateful, anti-Semitic, and dangerous. And yet, we must note today that, despite the seriousness of these words, Mr. Brusselmans was recently acquitted.

The attitude of the public prosecutor's office is completely incomprehensible to us. It is unacceptable. The public prosecutor's office must ensure compliance with the law and protect public order—in short, protect citizens. And in this specific case, the prosecutor requested acquittal.

May I ask you another question: are Jews not Flemish citizens like everyone else, or must they once again consider themselves second-class citizens, as they were 85 years ago? I am asking you this question as a member of a family that was victimized by the Holocaust. Is the statement “I want to stick a sharp knife in the throat of every Jew” not a criminal offense in Flanders?

I am not speaking here as a lawyer, but as a citizen and representative of a community that feels threatened. An acquittal does not erase the impact of such statements. They do not disappear from the memory of society, and certainly not from that of the Jews of Belgium. For us, the wound remains.

Our organizations have clearly demonstrated in their conclusions that there were indeed serious elements that deserved at least a substantive debate. And for us—survivors, citizens, parents, children of survivors—this debate is neither technical nor theoretical. It concerns our safety, our place in this country, and the signal that the justice system sends to those who spread hatred.

Mr. President,

Inciting hatred or violence against anyone—including people of Jewish origin—must be punishable by law. Period. If Jews want to continue living in safety in their country, hate speech must be punished.

Of course, we are not asking for a conviction in the light of the Nuremberg trials; we are simply asking for a conviction that reminds intellectuals of their responsibility.

Our future in this country and our quality of life in this country depend on it.

Let us not allow humanity to have learned nothing.

Let us not allow history to repeat itself.

Thank you.