

JEWISHINSIDER

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Milken conference holds its first-ever session entirely dedicated to fighting antisemitism

CNN host and entrepreneur Van Jones led the other panelists in considering the role of allies in fighting antisemitism, and discussing ways for them to become more strongly engaged

By [Gabby Deutch](#) May 7, 2024



LOS ANGELES — Inside the exclusive Milken Institute Global Conference happening this week in Beverly Hills, attendees schmoozed and took investing advice from some of the world's most successful leaders.

So when some people wiped away tears in a Monday afternoon panel discussion about addressing antisemitism, it was noticeable; the \$25,000-per-seat conference does not have a reputation for sentimentality. But the honest conversation and the speakers' cautious optimism, even at this difficult moment, emotionally moved some crowd members. Several of them wore yellow ribbon pins in honor of Israeli hostages. It was the first time in the conference's 27 years that organizers held an entire session focused on antisemitism.

More than anyone else, CNN host and entrepreneur Van Jones shared a perspective that appeared to resonate deeply with many in the crowd. He led the other panelists — moderator Richard Sandler, KIND Snacks founder Daniel Lubetzky, Sinai Temple Rabbi Emeritus and Harvard Divinity School scholar Rabbi David Wolpe and Arielle Mokhtarzadeh, a former UCLA student body president — in considering the role of allies in fighting antisemitism, and discussing ways for them to become more strongly engaged.

Jones praised the storied Black-Jewish relationship that powered the civil rights movement for decades, but acknowledged it must be rebuilt as the war in Gaza has strained ties between the two communities.

“Nationally, the big tragedy, the big horror, is the palpable and obvious collapse of the Black-Jewish alliance,” said Jones. “The collapse of the most important alliance in 10,000 years of human history. You’ve never had two outsider ethnic groups come together under worse circumstances, and do more good for more people than our peoples.”

He suggested focusing on areas of common ground, rather than the few where division rings.

“There’s five H’s, and we can get to, probably, a deal on four of the five. I don’t care about dialogue. I care about deals. I don’t want pity. I want a partnership,” said Jones.

“Number one is a humanitarian crisis in Gaza. African Americans are not going to be supportive of the IDF in that conflict. Don’t take it personally.

Black people don't support wars like that," said Jones, who also spoke at the November pro-Israel rally in Washington, D.C. "But there's four other H's." These include Jews' right to a secure homeland, the need to bring the hostages home, the rising hate crimes in the U.S. and Hamas, which he described as "a stench in the nostrils of God."

"There's four we can come together on, and we need now to reforge this alliance. We need to reforge it. The civil rights generation has gone now it's on us," said Jones, who offered some ideas: Make Tel Aviv a sister city with Atlanta, which has a large Black population; Bring kids from Atlanta to Tel Aviv; On the last day of Jewish holidays, celebrate with the local Black community.

Mokhtarzadeh described walking through the UCLA encampment last week and being shut down, with protesters deciding not to talk to her, as one of many experiences since Oct. 7 that led her to question whether Jews have been deserted by their allies.

"To be honest with you, on October 8, when I saw my friends who I showed up for time and time again go to social media, not to condemn one of the worst terror attacks in the history of the Jewish people, but to suddenly talk about rights and not rights of Palestinians or Israeli Arabs in Israel,"

Mokhtarzadeh said, "I thought to myself, What the heck, I showed up for you, you can't show up for me and to be honest with you, then up until this moment, I was done. I told myself I was done showing up for the other communities. But you [Van] being here has completely transformed my mind."

Lubetzky, the founder of KIND Snacks who has worked to build ties between Jews and Arabs in Israel and between Israelis and Palestinians, argued that the recent anti-Israel protests on college campuses are meant to divide the Jewish community — and to keep Jews separate and apart from other communities, unless Jews decide to continue engaging.

"This is not Israelis versus Palestinians or Jews versus Muslims or Blacks versus whites or left versus right. This is extremism versus problem solvers.

This is destroyers versus builders,” said Lubetzky. “They cannot defeat us because they don’t know how to build. They can only destroy, divide, diminish.”

At the end of the conversation, Mokhtarzadeh gave the high-achieving Milken crowd a homework assignment: Take the information from their antisemitism conversation and share it with whomever they meet this week. “Go out into the conference. Meet three people and talk about this session. Talk about what you learned, talk about the people you heard from. Figure out what resonated with you most and share it on your social media,” Mokhtarzadeh said. “Unfortunately, we’re all in this cycle of negativity, and we all have a story to share. Please share it, you’re part of the story.”