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Rabbinical Assembly concerned by French politician's anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim bigotry

NEW YORK – The leader of France's Front National political party, Marine Le Pen, who ran for president earlier this year, this weekend said the government should ban religious head coverings in public. She attempted to cover up her gaffe by saying that Jewish kippot pose no risk, but as she supported a ban on headscarves in public, she also felt compelled to ban kippot – because, she is reported to have said, “What would people say if I'd only asked to ban Muslim clothing? They'd burn me as a Muslim hater.”

In response, Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, Executive Vice President of the Rabbinical Assembly, the international umbrella organization for Conservative Rabbis, issued the following statement today:

Hatred does not occur in a vacuum. Political leaders have a responsibility to set a moral example. At this critical time, in the aftermath of hate speech and violence that shook the world, all who speak publicly must do so in the spirit of building greater tolerance and understanding. Marine Le Pen's recent comments encourage the growth of bigotry in a nation to whom the world looks for democratic and tolerant leadership.

Judaism teaches us that we must “receive every person with a pleasant countenance” (Ethics of the Fathers 1:15), enjoining us to engage the world in a spirit of acceptance and tolerance.

The religious of all faiths should not have to fear the non-violent expression of their religions; when that freedom is restricted, we can only assume that limitations on other freedoms – religious or otherwise – are not far behind.

The Rabbinical Assembly is the international association of Conservative rabbis. Since its founding in 1901, the Assembly has been the creative force shaping the ideology, programs, and practices of the Conservative movement, and is committed to building and strengthening the totality of Jewish life. Rabbis of the Assembly serve congregations throughout the world, and also work as educators, officers of communal service organizations, and college, hospital, and military chaplains. More information is available at www.rabbinicalassembly.org.

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