

RABBI DAVID SAPERSTEIN

WUPJ head visiting for UIA

PETER KOHN

NON-ORTHODOX Judaism in the US has seen extraordinary growth over six decades, with a significant uptick in Israel, Europe, Latin America and the former Soviet Union, according to Rabbi David Saperstein, president of the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

Speaking to *The AJN* before his Australian visit to headline the United Israel Appeal's Progressive Appeal, the US rabbi noted that while alternatives to Orthodoxy now exist in 50 nations, "we do face challenges in those countries in which the Orthodox dominate the Jewish community, in being fully accepted".

On Israel, Rabbi Saperstein said, "It's always a challenge for non-Orthodox communities to grow as robustly as they would like when the government of Israel will not recognise the [non-Orthodox] officiation of life-cycle ceremonies. On the other hand, the expanding number of synagogues and the growing membership of those synagogues, the growing number of people who choose to have their children become *bnai mitzvah* in Reform synagogues, the growth of non-Orthodox Jewish schools, makes it a very exciting time there."

The rise of US extremism troubles him deeply, although antisem-



Rabbi David Saperstein.

itism is "far less than in Europe".

"The time to respond to hatred is at the beginning, not after it's gained momentum. But we're heartened by the enormous civic and political support for those communities that have been attacked, including the Jewish communities," he said.

"We don't stand alone, and that makes this moment in Jewish history different."

President Donald Trump's "coarsening of the public discourse in America is a terrible model and it has been inferred and received by extremist groups on the right to be a validation of their views", he said.

Rabbi Saperstein, who was appointed US ambassador-at-large for religious freedom by former president Barack Obama, repre-

sented US Jewry with a reading at Obama's 2009 inauguration.

He said Obama "was a staunch supporter of Israel, that built closer relationships between our military and intelligence communities, who imposed sanctions on Iran sufficient to bring it to the negotiating table".

He also emphasised Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moving its embassy there was a good move.

Rabbi David Saperstein will address a public event at Temple Beth Israel on Thursday, March 12 at 7.30pm; he will give a drash at TBI's Kabbalat Shabbat service on Friday, March 13 at 6.15pm, and at the Leo Baeck Centre's Shabbat morning service on Saturday, March 14, at 10am. For more information: uspj@uspj.org.au