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Blair Seeks Mayor's Apology Over Nazi Remark

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON, Feb. 16 (AP) - Prime Minister Tony Blair urged London's mayor on Wednesday to apologize for an offensive remark made to a Jewish journalist comparing him to a Nazi concentration camp guard.

Mr. Blair said he did not believe that the comment by the mayor, Ken Livingstone, was meant to be anti-Semitic, or that it should jeopardize his job. But the prime minister urged the mayor to say he was sorry.

"A lot of us in politics get angry with journalists from time to time, but in the circumstances, and to the journalist because he was a Jewish journalist," Mr. Blair said on television. "Yes, he should apologize. Let's just apologize and move on - that's the sensible thing."

Mr. Livingstone's comment coincided with the release of a new report showing that the number of anti-Semitic attacks in Britain rose sharply to record levels in 2004, including physical attacks, name calling, hate mail and the desecration of property, like the vandalism of synagogues with swastikas.

In January, Prince Harry, 20, third in line to the British throne, caused an uproar by attending a costume party in London wearing a swastika armband. The royal family issued an apology on his behalf.

In addition, the opposition Conservative Party recently accused Mr. Blair's Labor Party of using an anti-Semitic advertisement on one of its Web sites. It showed the faces of the Tory leader, Michael Howard, and his deputy, both of whom are Jewish, transposed onto the bodies of flying pigs.

Asked about Mr. Livingstone, Mr. Howard said Wednesday that he thought it was important for politicians to talk with "civility and courtesy about the issues we all face." He added, "I think it is a matter of great sadness that we are not seeing that from the Labor Party."

Lord Janner, chairman of the Holocaust Educational Trust, praised Mr. Blair for urging Mr. Livingstone to apologize. Speaking on ITV News, Lord Janner said of the mayor: "I would never have regarded him in the past as being anti-Semitic. But the sort of remark he made is anti-Semitic."

For several days, Mr. Livingstone has turned down requests for an apology from Jewish and Holocaust groups, Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell and the London Assembly.

He has said he did not believe he had done anything wrong.