UN General Assembly adopts Israeli resolution aimed at combating Holocaust denial

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The United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution aimed at combating Holocaust denial on Thursday, in what was just the second time since Israel’s establishment that a measure its delegation brought before the forum managed to pass.

The resolution provides a specific classification for Holocaust denial, using the [working definition](https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-holocaust-denial-and-distortion) put together by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. It also provides actions expected to be taken by signatory countries in order to address the phenomenon, and demands social media networks remove posts that fall under the IHRA definition.

One hundred and fourteen countries cosponsored Resolution A/76/L30 and only Iran publicly voiced its opposition. The representative from the Islamic Republic — whose leaders have a long history of Holocaust denial — claimed the resolution marked another attempt by Israel “to exploit the suffering of Jewish people in the past as cover for the crimes it has perpetrated over the past seven decades against regional countries.”

However, because Tehran has failed to pay its UN membership dues, its delegation has been stripped of some of its rights, and it was therefore unable to call for a formal vote on the Israeli resolution.

As a result, the initiative was approved by consensus.

In an impassioned speech introducing the resolution, Erdan said that “Holocaust denial has spread like a cancer. It has spread under our watch. It has spread because people have chosen to be irresponsible and to avoid accountability.”

“As the number of Holocaust survivors diminishes, Holocaust denial is growing at a terrifying speed,” he said.

“As the number of survivors dwindles, the younger generations are being indoctrinated on social media to doubt reality and trust deception,” Erdan continued, claiming that social media platforms are “shirking responsibility.”

“‘We are only service providers,’ we hear from media executives. We recognize those words. We’ve heard them before. As you dodge responsibility, evil grows… Social media giants can no longer remain complacent to the hate that spreads on their platforms,” said the Israeli envoy.

He began his speech recalling the story of Chaim, a Holocaust survivor from a small village in Romania whose wife and eight children were exterminated by the Nazis.

Erdan called the resolution his “most important initiative” as ambassador. “Not only because I represent a Jewish state, not only because I am a Jew, but also because I am the grandson of Holocaust survivors.” He then revealed Chaim to be his late grandfather.

The envoy invited a group of five Holocaust survivors — as well as Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla, a child of survivors — to attend the vote and they were in the plenum gallery when it passed.

The resolution was introduced — and passed — on the 80th anniversary of the Wannsee Conference organized by the Nazis to coordinate the implementation of Hitler’s Final Solution.

Shortly after the birth of the initiative last month, Germany approached the Israeli delegation with a request to join as a “co-facilitator.” Recognizing the symbolic significance of such a partnership and the ability of Berlin to assist in the negotiation process, Jerusalem agreed to the proposal.

“It is Germany’s historical responsibility to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive and we are fully aware that we carry a special obligation in this regard,” the country’s UN envoy Antje Leendertse said in a statement after the adoption of the resolution.

United States Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield, whose delegation was among the cosponsors, said the measure “affirms our commitment to educate the next generation as a means to prevent the repetition of the terrible atrocities of the past.”

She noted the resolution’s passing days after the hostage standoff at a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, saying that the incident was the latest example of the need for Holocaust and antisemitism education.

“It reaffirms values and principles core to the founding of the United Nations, an institution built in the wake of the Holocaust and the Second World War. Adhering to the pledge of ‘Never Again,’ is our charge,” she said.

The resolution itself defines Holocaust denial as “intentional efforts to excuse or minimize the impact of the Holocaust or its principal elements, including collaborators and allies of Nazi Germany; gross minimization of the number of the victims of the Holocaust in contradiction to reliable sources; attempts to blame the Jews for causing their own genocide; statements that cast the Holocaust as a positive historical event; and attempts to blur the responsibility for the establishment of concentration and death camps devised and operated by Nazi Germany by putting blame on other nations or ethnic groups.”

It “urges member states to develop educational programs that will inculcate future generations with the lessons of the Holocaust in order to help to prevent future acts of genocide.”

It also “urges member states and social media companies to take active measures to combat antisemitism and Holocaust denial or distortion by means of information and communications technologies and to facilitate reporting of such content.”

In a briefing with reporters earlier this month, Erdan acknowledged that like all GA resolutions, this latest one will not come with an enforcement mechanism. However, he expressed hope that by setting a new “international standard” for what constitutes Holocaust denial and how social media companies are expected to act in response, the resolution will have significant ramifications on the discourse moving forward.

It was the first time a resolution introduced by Israel was adopted by the General Assembly since 2005, when the body passed an Israeli resolution declaring January 27 — the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp — as International Holocaust Remembrance Day.