The United Nations is not antisemitic, its point man on antisemitism says

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During an event marking International Holocaust Remembrance Day at the United Nations headquarters last month, Israeli Ambassador Gilad Erdan ripped the global body for failing to tackle antisemitism.

‘The U.N. was founded upon the ashes of the Holocaust. It was established to ensure such darkness would never be felt by humanity again,’ the ambassador said, with U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres present. ‘Yet, when it comes to fighting antisemitism, sadly, the U.N. ignores its purpose.

‘When it comes to anything related to Israel, this organization is very quick to respond and condemn. When it comes to Jew-hatred, the silence is deafening,’ Erdan added. ‘The double standard is disgraceful.’

Leaders of an overwhelming number of Jewish global organizations, as well as former and current Israeli officials, take it for granted that the U.N. suffers from an antisemitic rot. It has declined to adopt any definition of antisemitism—let alone the widely accepted one—it remains hyperfocused on resolutions and statements that criticize Israel and its employees glorify Nazis and call for Jewish deaths.

Last Thursday, [Ted Deutch](https://www.ajc.org/news/at-un-event-american-jewish-committee-ceo-ted-deutch-urges-un-to-do-more-to-call-out), CEO of the American Jewish Committee and a former member of Congress, said at the U.N. that leaders of the body must break ‘through indifference among some diplomats and some U.N. personnel to what happens here sometimes in these halls.’

**The soul of the U.N.**

So what does the man whom the United Nations assigned to tackle the problem think about it? For starters, he told JNS that he doesn’t believe that the U.N. is antisemitic.

‘The Israeli government has played an important role in international relations and has been recognized by the U.N.,’ Miguel Moratinos, U.N. focal point on monitoring antisemitism and enhancing a system-wide response, told JNS.

‘Israel and the Jewish people are integrated in the essence, in the soul of the U.N. So, how is the U.N. going to be antisemitic?’ asked Moratinos. ‘I have to tell you, the U.N. is not antisemitic.’

Moratinos, whose main U.N. function is serving in the senior role of high representative of the body’s Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), added that Erdan ‘should have been more positive.’

The antisemitism envoy cited several initiatives that he said made the case that the U.N. is not antisemitic, including a 2022 [action plan](https://www.jns.org/uns-point-man-on-religious-freedom-has-released-his-plan-for-combating-anti-semitism/) to combat antisemitism and ongoing UNESCO educational work. He also cited efforts of the Israeli diplomat, who he wished was more positive.

Erdan’s office told JNS that while he didn’t have any direct response to Moratinos’s assertions, Erdan noted that resolutions voted on by member states instructed the U.N. to establish the Holocaust and the U.N. Outreach Programme and hold specific ceremonies.

‘These are not U.N. organizational actions,’ the statement said.

Israel’s mission to the U.N. and Jewish groups have also criticized Moratinos and other U.N. officials for failing to call out [antisemitic comments](https://www.jns.org/opinion/lies-and-unapologetic-antisemitism-from-the-un-commission-of-inquiry/) from the U.N. special rapporteur for the Palestinians and members of the U.N. Human Rights Council’s Commission of Inquiry. Last July, Miloon Kothari, a member of the commission, told an anti-Israel website that ‘the Jewish lobby’ largely controls social media companies. Kothari apologized, but Navi Pillay, commission chair, said the quote was taken out of context. (The full interview was published.)

At the time, Moratinos [tweeted](https://twitter.com/MiguelMoratinos/status/1554129943625334787) a broad condemnation of antisemitism, without any specific references to U.N. officials. He stated that the UNAOC ‘remains committed to take a firm stance against antisemitism.’

But the U.N. took no stance—firm or otherwise—when it emerged in December that Francesca Albanese, the U.N. special rapporteur to the Palestinians and a longtime anti-Israel activist, had made antisemitic [remarks](https://www.jns.org/members-of-congress-urge-un-to-fire-official-over-antisemitic-comments/) during the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict. She said that ‘America and Europe, one of them subjugated by the Jewish Lobby, and the other by the sense of guilt about the Holocaust, remain on the sidelines.’

**Statute of limitations**

Moratinos told JNS he denounced a recent Palestinian terror attack in Jerusalem publicly. He has also condemned numerous instances of antisemitic comments and actions outside the context of the U.N., he said. But he first defended his lack of action when it came to Albanese’s quote by saying it dated back to 2014.

When JNS asked whether it was his position that a statute of limitations governs antisemitism, Moratinos said the special rapporteur, like members of the Commission of Inquiry, act independently of the U.N. and are ‘free to say whatever.’

Dan Mariaschin, CEO of B’nai B’rith International, has met with Moratinos several times and believes Moratinos takes antisemitism seriously. Some 25 years ago, Moratinos made himself available to meet with Jewish groups as European Union representative for the Middle East peace process and as Spanish ambassador to Israel and foreign minister, according to Mariaschin.

‘He’s also beginning to devote more attention to our issues,’ Mariaschin told JNS.

But Mariaschin thinks there is a lot of work to be done. ‘They need to address this inside the U.N., under the U.N.’s roof itself,’ he said.

The secretary-general needs to always have Moratinos’s back on antisemitism at the U.N., according to Mariaschin. ‘If it’s not coming from the top, then why would country A, country B, country C—or any other U.N. agency for that matter—feel that they need at the very least to be careful in what they say?’ he asked.

Part of Moratinos’s mandate is to develop a U.N. action and response plan for antisemitism. He told JNS that the pandemic held up his preferred timeline for that plan. Multiple Jewish leaders told JNS he is open to meeting regularly to discuss antisemitism and that his focal point role is a small focus of his overall U.N. responsibilities.

**Cordoba in June**

But despite rising levels of antisemitism in the United States and overseas, the plan is not expected until June, Moratinos said. He has said that the U.N. can and will do a better job of rooting out Jew-hatred within its ranks.

Moratinos is slated to meet with Jewish leaders in June in his home country of Spain, in the city of Cordoba. Cordoba has a historic Jewish quarter, including a medieval synagogue, and it is the birthplace of Maimonides.

Most efforts to combat antisemitism focus on the Western world, but an analysis that Moratinos’s office conducted found a lack of education and awareness about hatred of Jews in Africa and India. A broader approach is necessary, he decided.

Moratinos told JNS the plan will have three parts. The U.N.’s global communications department will continue awareness initiatives, including those related to Holocaust remembrance. UNESCO will continue investing in educational programs, with increased focus on modern antisemitism. And the U.N. will establish an observatory mechanism for antisemitic attacks and for safeguarding synagogues and other Jewish sites.

‘We want to really have a clear engagement to denounce any antisemitic attitude or feeling in the system,’ Moratinos said. ‘Our plan is similar to the European strategy. We will be inspired by certain elements.’

Moratinos might have assumed the role was narrow or secondary and manageable with his U.N. Alliance of Civilizations job, according to Mariaschin. But special envoys, like Deborah Lipstadt’s State Department role monitoring and combating antisemitism, tend to be more proactive, he said.

‘Whether he felt that he could do this on the side, I don’t know,’ Mariaschin said. ‘Does he hear us? He certainly does. Does he understand it? I think he does. The question is, what more can be done within the U.N. itself to counter the antisemitism and anti-Israel bias within its own system?

‘Who better to deal with problems of antisemitism within the U.N. itself than someone in a leadership position?’ Mariaschin asked.

Moratinos remains adamant that his employer is not antisemitic.

‘What is clear, with fact, with action, is that the U.N. is not antisemitic,’ he told JNS.

In response to questions from JNS about whether Guterres is pleased with the pace and manner in which Moratinos is addressing antisemitism, the office of the secretary-general said only, ‘Mr. Moratinos represents the secretary-general in these matters.’

As he and the U.N. develop a response plan to antisemitism, the disconnect between what Moratinos says he believes and what Israel and Jewish groups see as plain as day may prove exceedingly difficult to bridge.