Letter by Stand With Us to United Nations Secretary-General re: Systemic Antisemitism

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Stand With US

<https://www.standwithus.com/post/letter-to-united-nations-human-rights-council-re-systemic-antisemitism>

To: Secretary-General Guterres

United Nations Headquarters New York, N.Y. 10017 USA

[antonio.guterres@un.org](mailto:antonio.guterres@un.org) & [sgcentral@un.org](mailto:sgcentral@un.org)

***Re: The United Nations Human Rights Council’s Systemic Antisemitism, including the Establishment of its Commission of Inquiry on Israel***

His Excellency Mr. António Manuel de Oliveira Guterres: As an international non-profit organization committed to education and combating antisemitism, StandWithUs thanks you for standing against antisemitism at the 2022 United Nations International Holocaust Remembrance Service. As you correctly note, antisemitism is on the rise, and the recent Holocaust denial that has accompanied it is “deeply disturbing.”[[1]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn1) Indeed, we must learn from the Holocaust and recognize that antisemitism manifests in modern times against both the Jewish individual and collective, the State of Israel. We must also recognize that the path to hateful acts begins with hateful language: scapegoating Jews, targeting them for unfair treatment, and holding Jews and the Jewish state to a double standard. Antisemitism is empowered by inciting violence against Jews and Israel and then ignoring (or excusing) such violence. Failure to learn from the Holocaust indicates that we are bound to repeat its actions and consequences. **In this public letter, we therefore ask for your help in combating antisemitism amongst your own ranks in the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and its Commission of Inquiry on Israel at this most crucial time.** As you know, the UNHRC has launched a commission of inquiry (COI) that exhibits all the hallmarks of antisemitism: false accusations against, unfair treatment of, and a double standard for both Jews and Israel, while casting a blind eye to violence against Jews and Israel.[[2]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn2) This open-ended, permanent inquiry is dedicated—forever—to finding fault with the world’s only Jewish state.[[3]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn3)

As an initial matter, the COI is disingenuous about human rights**.** Its founding resolution[[4]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn4) failsto name Hamas, a terrorist group that committed an excess of war crimes by indiscriminately firing 4,000 rockets and operating near Palestinian civilian homes and schools in May 2021.[[5]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn5) Of the 24 states that voted for the COI, nearly all are non-democracies,[[6]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en" \l "_ftn6" \t "_blank) which inherently disregard human rights. Moreso, Pakistan—the resolution’s co-author[[7]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en" \l "_ftn7" \t "_blank)—had its own genocide in 1971 when it murdered up to 3 million Bengalis.[[8]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn8) Others voting in favor, China and Mauritania, are complicit in genocide and slavery (see below).[[9]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn9)

**Your role as secretary-general bears much influence**. In response to this abuse of the UNHRC’s authority, we urge you to mirror the moral fortitude and clarity of your [predecessor](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/ban-kimoon-united-nations-disproportionate-israel-focus-resolutions-palestinians-human-rights-danny-danon-a7481961.html) Ban ki-Moon, and condemn the UN’s “disproportionate” criticism against the Jewish state that has “foiled the ability of the UN to fulfill its role and mission effectively.”[[10]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn10) As set forth below, we ask that you take measures to ensure that all UN agencies are educated about—and guided by—the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism and its contemporary examples.[[11]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn11) We also implore you to use your good offices in the UN to condemn the COI and ensure that its findings are not able to cause further harm to the State of Israel or its people.

**Antisemitism regularly entails unfair treatment and double standards against both Jews and Jewish institutions. The COI on Israel involves both.**

Keeping in mind the need to always assess full context, the IHRA definition and examples regard as generally antisemitic the practice of “applying double standards by requiring of [Israel] a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.”[[12]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn12)

In terms of **unfair treatment** **towards the Jewish state**, the UN has historically made selective use of relevant policies and procedures: applying them when useful to attack Israel but abandoning them when they stand in the way of such anti-Israel efforts. Two of the procedures that allow the COI to attack Israel here include the broad and calculated wording of the topics on which it has solicited testimony for its eventual report and the use of an anonymous submissions portal.[[13]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn13) Take for example the language of the first topic, which is framed as focusing on systemic racial discrimination.[[14]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn14) This particular wording unfairly directs testimony towards the COI’s predetermined conclusion — that Israel practices apartheid.[[15]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn15) The anonymous submissions portal then obscures transparency, allowing the commission to selectively credit or ignore testimony, with no accountability, so that its predetermined outcome is “supported” by the so-called “evidence.”[[16]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn16)

On the other hand, whileUN Guidelines recommend that COIs select a membership that has “a proven record of independence and impartiality,” the COI has chosen to ignore this policy.[[17]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn17) The president of this COI and one of her fellow commissioners clearly fail to satisfy this standard of impartiality.[[18]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn18) They have already accused Israel of apartheid or a “banstustan-type situation [sic].”[[19]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn19) Both have also warned or accused Israel of war crimes.[[20]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn20) The remaining COI commissioner has accused Israel of “disrespecting international law.”[[21]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn21) Choosing a commission whose membership has already reached its conclusions about Israel does not further the cause of justice. Instead, it perpetuates a false narrative intently bent on bashing the Jewish state. When applicable rules and guidance are used as weapons for castigating the Jewish state, one may justly conclude antisemitic intent.

The commission’s further **double standards against Israel** only reinforce its antisemitic nature.In particular, the COI on Israel reeks of double standards in its mandate and funding. The first and only open-ended commission of inquiry, this COI is also the first whose mandate does not need to be renewed annually. [[22]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn22) This encourages endless criticism of the Jewish state, which already bears criticism from an unprecedented eight other UN investigative bodies.[[23]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn23)

The COI’s mandate, whose “specified” timeframe lasts from the beginning of time to all eternity, reflects the COI’s blatantly antisemitic conviction that the Jewish state, regardless of its actions, is worthy of constant international condemnation.[[24]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn24)

This COI has been allotted an unprecedented amount of resources, somehow receiving twice as much money and fifty-percent more staff than the COI on Syria.[[25]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn25) This comes despite the Syrian civil war claiming somewhere between 350,000 and 600,000 lives in total (reports vary), a figure 84 to 145 times the number of Israeli and Palestinian lives (roughly 4,133 total) that have been claimed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since 2011.[[26]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn26)In light of this, the exorbitant amount of funding and other resources allocated for this COI makes clear that scrutinizing the Jewish state remains a top priority of the UN. Singling out Israel for such a double standard is antisemitic.

As countless double standards abound, the COI’s bad faith motives become ever more apparent in its attack on the Jewish state, in which nearly half of the world’s Jews live.[[27]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn27) The COI will no doubt seek to legitimize its preconceived biases by finding Israel guilty of violations of international law. Such claims are not merely false but arguably a modern manifestation of the ever-evolving antisemitic stereotypes originally targeting Jewish individuals, now leveled at the Jewish collective, the State of Israel.

**The COI’s antisemitism detracts from the UN’s cause of supporting human rights**.

While you yourself admirably fight for human rights around the globe, the UNHRC, from its very founding, has been complicit in anti-Israel bias. [[28]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn28) Its predecessor, the UN Commission of Human Rights, was actually disbanded in part because of “its unfair treatment of Israel.”[[29]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn29) Unsurprisingly, the former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan condemned the commission. He notes, “a credibility deficit has developed, which casts a shadow on the reputation of the United Nations system as a whole.”[[30]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn30)

The UNHRC sadly reflects much of the same biases that only frustrate the cause of human rights. While the UNHRC has exhausted over 50 percent of its condemnatory resolutions on Israel, it has failed to condemn by resolution the worst of human rights violators, such as China, where [2](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-rights-un/u-n-says-it-has-credible-reports-that-china-holds-million-uighurs-in-secret-camps-idUSKBN1KV1SU) million Uyghurs and Muslims remain in concentration camps; Mauritania, where up to 20 % of its population live in slavery; and other countries that encourage and engage in slavery.[[31]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn31)The UNHRC’s failure to call out genocide, the gravest of abuses, targeting the Uyghurs and the Yazidis suggests that there remains much work to do in terms of restoring the UNHRC to its fundamental purpose: addressing human rights.[[32]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn32) This outcome remains unrealistic so long as 68 percent of its membership continues to be non-democratic nations engaged in blatant and egregious human rights violations.[[33]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn33)

**Therefore, we ask for the UN, including the UNHRC, to address ALL human rights, including when Jews are the victims, a trend that you recognize is on the incline.**

Secretary-General Guterres, you correctly assess that antisemitism is the world’s “oldest form of hate and prejudice.”[[34]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftn34) It is crucial to note that a primary reason for its persistence today is the failure to identify and act upon each evolving iteration of antisemitism. We therefore specifically urge you to:

(1) recognize the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism and its examples;

(2) ensure that UN officials and agencies are guided by this most widely accepted definition in their future conduct; and

(3) publicly condemn the COI on Israel, the circumstances of which not only violate UN guidelines, but also fall within the IHRA Definition and its examples.

These steps would set a much-needed precedent whose legacy can only go down on the right side of history.

Respectfully,



Roz Rothstein

CEO & Co-founder, StandWithUs

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Carly F. Gammill

Director, StandWithUs Center for Combating Antisemitism

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Jordan Cope

Director of Policy Education, StandWithUs

Cc: Navi Pillay, Chair, UNHRC COI on Israel (via email)

[[1]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftnref1) Edith Lederer, “UN chief decries antisemitism, urges stand against hatred,” *ABC News*, January 26, 2022. [[2]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftnref2) *See* “The United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel,” *UN Human Rights Council*, February 11, 2022; AFP and TOI Staff, “Former head of UN rights council to lead open-ended probe of Israel,” *Times of Israel*, July 22, 2001. [[3]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftnref3) *See* ibid. [[4]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftnref4) Resolution S30/1, *Ensuring respect for international human rights law and international humanitarian law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel*, A/RES/S30/1 (27 May 2021), available from https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/resolution-adopted-human-rights-council-27-may-2021-s-301. [[5]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftnref5) “Hamas,” Counter Extremism Project, 2022; Isabel Debre, “How Hamas amassed thousands of rockets to strike at Israel,” *LA Times*, May 20, 2021; Joseph Krauss, “EXPLAINER: Are Israel, Hamas committing war crimes in Gaza?,” *AP News and 9 News*, May 18, 2021; “UN Watch Documents Hamas’ Double War Crimes Ahead of Tomorrow’s UNHRC Session on Israel,” *UN Watch*, May 26, 2021. [[6]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftnref6) Resolution S30/1; *See* “Global democracy has a very bad year,” *The Economist*, February 2, 2021. [[7]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftnref7) Tovah Lazaroff, “UNHRC poised to approve war crimes probe into Israel on Gaza, Jerusalem,” *Jerusalem Post*, May 26, 2021. [[8]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftnref8) Lorraine Boissoneault, “The Genocide the U.S. Can’t Remember, But Bangladesh Can’t Forget,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, December 16, 2016. [[9]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftnref9) Joel Gunter, “China committed genocide against Uyghurs, independent tribunal rules,” *BBC*, December 09, 2021; John Sutter, “Slavery’s last stronghold,” *CNN*, 2012; Resolution S30/1. [[10]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftnref10) May Bulman, “Ban Ki-moon says UN has 'disproportionate' focus on Israel,” *Independent*, December 18, 2016. [[11]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftnref11) "What is antisemitism?” *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance*, 2016. [[12]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftnref12) Ibid. [[13]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftnref13) *See supra* n.2,“The United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry.” [[14]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftnref14) *See* ibid. [[15]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftnref15) *See* ibid. [[16]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftnref16) *See* ibid. [[17]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftnref17) United Nations and United Nations Human Rights: Office of the High Commissioner, “Commissions of Inquiry and Fact-Finding Missions on International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law” (London and Geneva, 2015), 19. [[18]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftnref18) *See* ibid. [[19]](https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/121a6a94-37d0-4344-8957-8394c526443e/blog/62462236b2e69216d2b3f06e/edit?referralInfo=sidebar&lang=en#_ftnref19) Africa for Palestine, “Navi Pillay on Israel being an Apartheid State: Short Version,” January 29, 2018, 0:00 – 0:20, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sIEfCf1Dhs; Am Johal, “International Housing Activist Miloon Kothari,” *Worldpress*, October 30, 2007. 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