With Antisemitism on the Rise, Deafening Silence From Human Rights Organizations

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Recent weeks have seen the most severe global spike in antisemitism in recent memory. In the United States, synagogues have been vandalized and Jews have been brutally assaulted in the streets; in Europe, crowds have chanted for the death of Jews; and in the United Kingdom, antisemitic incidents are said to have risen by almost 500% since mid-May.

The sharp increase in attacks came amid Israel’s recent military operation in Gaza, which catalyzed a flood of misinformation and hate speech both online and offline. Discourse criticizing Israel frequently crossed the line into antisemitic tropes and even violence — shattering the long-held conviction that Jews need only fear antisemitism from the far right.

In the face of such an alarming trend, one might expect organizations — and especially Jewish organizations — flying the banner of human rights to position themselves at the forefront of the battle against this ongoing physical and verbal violence.

Yet in the conversation surrounding what is perhaps the 21st century’s worst wave of antisemitism so far, the voices of these NGOs are conspicuously absent.

In the last two weeks, radical American Jewish organizations such as IfNotNow and Jewish Voice for Peace have produced a firestorm of tweets, articles, and reports roundly condemning Israel’s conduct towards the Palestinians throughout its most recent military operation. Protests and rallies have been organized in every major city, boycotts have been promoted, and celebrities have been recruited in the cause of denouncing Israel.

Yet when vicious attacks occur on the very community that they claim to represent, those attacks are met for the most part with either deafening silence or with the familiar talking point that anti-Zionism and antisemitism are different — an argument that rings hollow when behavior that can only be categorized as antisemitic is tacitly excused time and time again.

A particularly tone-deaf example of this deep-seated denial, was IfNotNow’s [tweet](https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-kpAoMqefa5c/YK3HG6664oI/AAAAAAACG0k/DEtf1s-4NxAIMfkZBF1bOZOAkxwGJFdwwCLcBGAsYHQ/s596/wecanshow.png) last month, which urged progressive Jews to “show the world that Jews don’t need Israel in order to keep us safe,” thanks to the existence of “thriving, flourishing, safe Jewish lives in the diaspora.”

The reality on the streets of Los Angeles and New York, in the halls of academia, and in cyberspace, tells a very different story.

International human rights NGOs, for their part, have not done much better.

Organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), and Oxfam — who did not let a day of Operation Guardian of the Walls go by without some condemnation of Israel’s actions in Gaza — have had hardly a word to say about the ongoing violence directed at Jews, sometimes just blocks from their own offices in New York and London. In stark contrast to the solidarity they displayed with other minorities in recent years, Diaspora Jews now find themselves facing this latest onslaught of hate entirely alone.

This indifference shouldn’t surprise us.

After all, this is the same cohort that has fanned the flames of incitement for years, making frequent use of inflammatory language such as “Jewish supremacy,” “apartheid,” and “genocide,” when referring to the state of Israel. And these are the same organizations that have [campaigned](https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/ihra/) [fiercely](https://twitter.com/ifnotnoworg/status/1366579468614197248) against the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, which incidentally includes holding Jews collectively responsible for Israel’s actions.

Indeed, human rights organizations have often not only ignored the issue of antisemitism, but have added fuel to the fire, such as when a former HRW employee [suggested in 2015](https://twitter.com/sarahleah1/status/560700886805389312) that the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, should “also show pic[ture]s of death and destruction in Gaza,” or Amnesty International’s [repeated erasure](https://www.ngo-monitor.org/reports/amnesty-internationals-antisemitic-campaign-against-jewish-tourism/) of Jewish connection to the land of Israel in its reports. Not only is such rhetoric inaccurate and inappropriate, but its origin is well-known — and respected human rights organizations foster a climate in which antisemitic discourse is acceptable.

If Jews in multiple countries no longer feel comfortable or safe expressing their identity, that is a human rights issue of no less importance than the many already present on these NGOs’ agendas. To minimize or to ignore it, at best, strengthens antisemitism, and at worst, lends credence to the idea that these organizations are afflicted by a similar bias.