Combating all forms of antisemitism must remain global priority to challenge rising hatred – UN experts

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Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

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*On the occasion of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, UN human rights experts\* reiterate their calls to combat antisemitism and all forms of religious and racial bigotry. They issue the following statement:*

“Over the years, we, and the UN mandates that we hold, have repeatedly issued warnings of the dangers of hatred, bigotry, racism and prejudice to all peoples everywhere. Early reports confirm that 2021 – like 2020, 2019, and 2018 before it – was a year in which monitors around the world again documented historically high levels of antisemitism.

We have warned about the need to raise awareness about persistent and emerging forms of antisemitic hatred, the need to document trends and to uphold the human rights obligations of States and human rights responsibilities of non-state actors in combating antisemitism in all its forms.

Of particular concern over the past year are the many reports that Jewish people, and sites, were subjected to violence, discrimination and harassment by people targeting them as proxies for Israel because of their Jewish identity, particularly during and following armed hostilities in the Middle East in May 2021. Jewish people were violently attacked, suffered death threats and were harassed online; Jewish neighbourhoods were targeted by groups of individuals making violent threats; Jewish religious, educational, and cultural sites were vandalized and defaced; and protests targeted synagogues and Jewish community centres.

Conflict in the Middle East is frequently accompanied by a spike in antisemitism globally. Critiques of Israeli Government actions and policies that violate human rights including those of Palestinians, are both warranted and valid from a human rights perspective. However, in many cases, rhetoric and statements about Israel endorsed by public figures, academics and others went beyond criticizing Israeli policies or actions to assertions that Zionism, the self-determination movement of the Jewish people, is an inherently racist ideology and a form of racial supremacy, suggesting that supporting Zionism is inherently equivalent to supporting racial discrimination. Not only is this narrative false; it has also shown to fuel resentment against Jews and normalise bias against Jewish communities worldwide.

We regret that although UN leaders specifically warned Member States against airing antisemitic diatribes at UN meetings and other international fora, this warning was not heeded, and “Zionism is racism” trope continues to be aired.

As the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s *Working Definition of Antisemitism*notes while determinations concerning antisemitism must always be made with regard to “the overall context” and while “criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as anti-Semitic … holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel” is a form of antisemitism, as is "[d]enying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour."

Experts, including the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, have encouraged the use of the IHRA working definition as a non-legal tool, especially in the areas of data collection, education and awareness-raising. Using this working definition in accordance with international human rights standards will not only contribute to the global efforts in combating antisemitism but will also make the space for contentious public debates more capacious and inclusive.

We reiterate the call upon UN Member States in the 2005 UN General Assembly resolution 60/7, to educate future generations about the Holocaust as “a warning to all people of the dangers of hatred, bigotry, racism and prejudice”. We therefore welcome the resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly last week condemning Holocaust denial as an important milestone in the fight against global antisemitism and all forms of hatred. We hope it also serves as an inspiration to rejecting increasing instances of genocide denial, including the Srebrenica genocide in Bosnia.

We urge stakeholders to come together and act within a human rights framework to ensure that the facts of the Holocaust are known and to appreciate how antisemitic conspiracy theories and harmful narratives contribute to an environment in which violence, discrimination and hatred can flourish.”

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