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Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, follow-up and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Written statement* submitted by Institute for NGO Research, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[1 February 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



The United Nations Must Adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Definition of Antisemitism

Antisemitism is endemic in the political discourse about Israel and Zionism and parallels on-going physical violence against Jews. Many institutions that claim to represent human rights and humanitarian values instead promulgate antisemitic rhetoric and tropes; tolerate antisemitism from executives and staff, with little to no repercussions; and consistently dismiss consideration of antisemitism as a human rights issue.

This dynamic is prevalent in almost every United Nations (UN) framework and the Human Rights Council in particular. It is also endemic in many of the most powerful organizations claiming to promote human rights such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, and in numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that partner with and are funded by UN agencies. Not only do these institutions promote antisemitism, but when incidents are brought to their attention, they are met with apathy and an absence of accountability and public debate. Governments that fund these UN agencies and NGOs, most notably the European Union and European governments, enable this impunity.

Effectively confronting antisemitism first requires building consensus on the basic elements. An important tool is the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism. The IHRA definition, which uniquely addresses both “new” and classical antisemitism, has been adopted by dozens of governments and intergovernmental organizations. It has clear value as an educational resource and a yardstick for evaluating whether a particular statement or incident is marked by antisemitism, and where hatred of Jews is expressed under the guise of anti-Israel sentiment. Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief, Ahmed Shaheed, importantly highlighted the definition as “valuable guidance.”¹

Many UN officials offer platitudes directed towards the need to combat antisemitism. Nevertheless, these words are of little substance without action. Unfortunately, the UN has failed to adopt this definition, or present any alternative standard, aimed at preventing the antisemitism that is rampant within its halls.

The IHRA definition is not a “cure-all”. We do not claim that its adoption will erase the twisted hatred of Jews and Israel that inspire antisemitism. However, recognizing its importance and using it as a basis for policy implementation can make a major difference in pushing antisemitism further to the margins of acceptable discourse and in ensuring that the UN and the governments operating in UN halls are fighting, instead of enabling, antisemitic expression.

To that end, the Institute for NGO Research recommends that UN agencies, member states, and observer states and entities institute clear and specific implementation mechanisms in order to maximize their commitments, as well as ensure that no resources, nor support are given to frameworks promoting antisemitism:²

- UN Member and Observer States and Entities Governments should develop guidelines and best practices across all branches and at the highest levels. Of particular importance are standards for Ministries of Foreign Affairs and/or Development Agencies responsible for allocating taxpayer funds to UN institutions and related civil society projects;
- The IHRA definition and accompanying examples, as markers for antisemitic rhetoric and activity, should be explicitly incorporated into Calls for Proposals and Grant Agreements as grounds for disqualification from receiving funds and termination of projects. Such conditions must be made explicit, and potential grantees must be informed of their existence;

¹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, September 20, 2019: <https://undocs.org/A/74/358>.

² Read our full policy paper here: http://www.ngo-monitor.org/pdf/IHRA_Policy_Paper.pdf.

- Government bodies responsible for disbursing funding should develop rigorous and thorough vetting systems to guarantee that UN institutions and project partners that engage in antisemitism are disqualified. These evaluations must not be limited to technical capacity, but must consider all aspects of the potential grantees' activity. Vetting should also occur at regular intervals throughout the duration of the grant period;
 - Governments should establish investigative capacities and procedures, including suspension of funding, when evidence suggests that a UN agency is violating funding conditions relating to antisemitism. Such evaluations must be thorough and independent, cannot rely on self-reporting, and should include mechanisms for third-party interventions in submitting complaints and information;
 - Governments should develop specific responses, including cancellation of donations, grant contracts, and other measures when the terms funding agreements are breached. Guidelines are also required to determine conditions for determining when an entity would be eligible for future funding;
 - The agendas of parliamentary groups on antisemitism should include examining UN activities, based on the IHRA working definition, incorporating it into budgets and other legislation, and allotting funds for the development of educational effort.
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