



Concept Note

Informal Meeting on Exploring Holistic Approaches to Combating Antisemitism

Monday, 15 March 2021

8:30 AM – 12:30 PM EST

Background

Earlier this year we commemorated on 27 January the 76th anniversary of the Holocaust amid reports of rising wave of antisemitic incidents in North America, Europe and elsewhere. Seventy-six years seem like something of the past, but the fierce resurgence in antisemitic attacks here in the United States, Europe and elsewhere is a stark reminder that hate against Jews or antisemitism that was manifested in the Holocaust, is still present in our communities today.

As the world battled a deadly pandemic, we also had to face the menace of the toxic ideologies of neo-Nazis and far-right extremists spreading in mainstream media and especially on the dark web. They targeted Jews as well as other faith communities and vulnerable populations exploiting their fear and the social turmoil created by the pandemic. It is to be noted that despite recently strengthened policies by internet providers that have been increasingly booting out hate groups from popular social media platforms, these groups moved their communications into encrypted chatrooms, which makes it harder to track and monitor.

Recent statistics on hate manifestations are very telling.

An FBI report on hate crimes in the United States released in November 2020 recorded 953 hate crimes were committed against Jews in 2020, a 14-percent increase from the 835 recorded in 2019. The deadliest antisemitic attacks on Jews in the US in Pittsburgh and Poway were committed by white supremacists and Neo-Nazis.

In 2019, hate crimes against Jews constituted 60.2 percent of all hate crimes based on religion, a slight increase from the 58 percent recorded in 2017 and 2018. For the sake of comparison, Muslims were the next most-targeted group at 13.2 percent.

The 2020 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Intolerance and a study by the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights state that there has been an 18% increase in antisemitism globally alone. Such incidents were not limited to antisemitic rhetoric but also attacks on Jewish religious and sacred sites. Such incidents were fueled by conspiracy theories that COVID19 virus had been manufactured and spread by Jews. Terrorist attacks, like on the synagogue in Halle in 2019 and on the kosher supermarket in Paris in 2015 and in Graz, Austria last August show us that,



antisemitism has not been eliminated in Europe despite institutional and legislative policies measures taken by many European governments.

These heinous incidents remind us that we should never forget the lessons learnt from the horrors of the Holocaust so that we ensure that, indeed, it never happens again to any community, Jews and non-Jews. Standing-up collectively against hatred will prevent its mongers from normalizing hatred.

Combating Antisemitism and the Nexus to Human Rights

Antisemitism is not a problem of Jewish communities alone; it is also a deep-seated threat to democratic societies. Hence, the upsurge of antisemitism cannot be seen in isolation from an extremely troubling increase in xenophobia, homophobia, discrimination and hatred in many parts of the world, targeting people on the basis of their identity, including race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, disability and immigration status. Defeating this scourge plaguing our societies and fragmenting it requires comprehensive strategies that addresses all forms of discrimination and related intolerance based on religion and belief.

The aforementioned attacks including those on synagogues and the desecration of Jewish cemeteries are a violation of the right to the freedom of religion or belief. Such acts often prevent individuals from professing their religion and practicing it out of fear which is an infringement of article 2 of the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

Therefore, developing human rights-based strategies to prevent and counter the spread of antisemitism as well as other manifestations of discrimination and racism requires a coordinated and holistic approach that brings together government, civil society, faith communities, religious actors, the private sector, media, schools, and universities. Investment in all parts of society is crucial to building inclusive, diverse and cohesive societies rooted in human rights.

The United Nations and Combating Antisemitism

The United Nations strives everywhere to support governments in building inclusive, diverse, cohesive societies anchored in human rights and the rule of law. The United Nations Secretary General has been vocal in rejection to all manifestations of antisemitism. In February 2020, Mr. Antonio Guterres designated the High-Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, Mr. Miguel Moratinos as the UN Focal Point to monitor antisemitism and enhance a system wide response.

Since 2005, the UN Holocaust Outreach Programme has carried the testimony of survivors, and its relevance today. The written materials and videos inform and raise awareness about the



Holocaust. UNESCO together with the European Commission and the World Jewish Congress have recently launched an on-line campaign to debunk disinformation and encourage citizens to think before sharing content on-line.

Learning remains to be key to a better understanding of the Holocaust and Jewish life can contribute to reduce antisemitic stereotypes and prejudices and ensure that it never happens again. However, education about antisemitism should not be limited to the Holocaust and neglecting other contemporary forms of antisemitism. The United Nations, including UNESCO is leading important work providing education and guidelines for educators and policy makers. This effort would be further enhanced with the support of member states when school curriculum address antisemitism. Illiteracy and ignorance of historical facts creates fertile ground for lies and revisionist history.

Additionally, within the context of preventing and combating discrimination and hate speech based on religion, belief or race, the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites was developed by the office of the High Representative for UNAOC in 2019 to specifically address the rise in attacks on places of worship including synagogues, churches and mosques. The plan offers concrete recommendations to support governments and other stakeholders so that all can enjoy their right to observe religious rituals in safety. The plan offers concrete actions to non-state actors on strengthening interreligious and intercultural dialogue as viable tool to prevent violent extremism and enhance social cohesion. The plan has been further enforced through a resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly “*Promoting a culture of peace and tolerance to safeguard religious sites*” on 21 January 2021. The UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech launched in 2019 is a demonstration of the UN ‘s commitment at the most senior level to defeat hatred in all its forms, on-line and off-line through a context-specific action plans to combat hate speech.

Objective of the Meeting

Explore synergies and good practices in combating antisemitism so as to develop a system-wide guidance on preventing and countering antisemitism across the UN system.

These are preliminary pointers for framing the discussion:

- In a 2018 survey on antisemitism conducted by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, 70% of Jews consider that efforts by member states to combat antisemitism are not effective, what are the challenges to advancing on-going efforts to preventing and countering anti-Semitism?



- Some EU member states have adopted a stand-alone strategy on combating antisemitism, others adopted one integrating it into general strategies on combating racism and discrimination. Which is a better approach?
- Many civil society organizations including Jewish Organizations are leading initiatives to combating antisemitism, how to consolidate and integrate those initiatives into the broader responses to antisemitism?
- Prevention is key in combating antisemitism, should governments invest more in prevention of violent extremism and xenophobic discourse by creating programs that build resilient and cohesive societies as opposed to punitive measures?
- How to address antisemitic discourse when used by prominent political figures/parties?
- Based on good practices, should manifestations of hatred be criminalized or restrictive measures suffice?