

Simon Wiesenthal Center Report on Antisemitism

Submitted to Dr. Ahmed Shaheed The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief

The Simon Wiesenthal Center (SWC), an ECOSOC accredited NGO at the United Nations is pleased to present the following report on antisemitism to the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

The SWC is named after the famous Holocaust survivor, pursuer of Nazi war criminals and human rights advocate, Simon Wiesenthal. Under the leadership of its Dean and Founder, Rabbi Marvin Hier and Associate Dean Rabbi Abraham Cooper, the SWC both worked with Mr.

Wiesenthal and has continued to carry on his legacy today. The SWC is a global human rights organization researching the Holocaust and hate in a historic and contemporary context. The Center confronts antisemitism, hate and terrorism, promotes human rights and dignity, stands with Israel, defends the safety of Jews worldwide, and teaches the lessons of the Holocaust for future generations. It is one of the largest Jewish human rights agencies, with offices in North and South America, Europe and the Middle East, and with a strong presence in Asia as well, and is engaged internationally with accreditation at the UN, UNESCO, OSCE, Organization of American States (OAS), the Latin American Parliament (PARLATINO) and the Council of Europe.

Seventy five years after the end of the Holocaust, fueled by social media and an increasingly raw and divisive political discourse, nourished by extreme nationalism and radical religion,



antisemitism has become a critical issue in today's world. In Europe, where the Holocaust decimated what was once a center of Jewish life, the communities that have survived and struggled to rebuild are now facing such acute risk that even non-Jewish political leaders are have publicly expressed concern about the possible of end of thousands of years of European Jewish life.¹

Violent antisemitism has permeated Europe, with Jews facing physical threats in countries like France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Germany and others, while antisemitism has been legitimized as political discourse in the United Kingdom, Sweden, Poland, Hungary and throughout the continent.

Antisemitism is not only violent; it appears in many different forms throughout Europe. In France, not only are Jews murdered, but when an arrest is finally made judges appear to look for excuses to avoid bring the accused to trial, perhaps because of the Muslim identity of the accused. ² This leniency makes it appear as if there is a double standard and that Jews are not treated equally, and thus undermines Jewish belief in the fairness of the French judicial system. This threat emanating from radical Islamists and is not limited to France but lies behind a majority of the physical attacks on Jews in recent years in Europe. Although not as prevalent,

¹ See for example, the 2015 remark of Frans Timmermans, then first vice president of the European Commission, at a memorial service for the Jews murdered in the attack on the kosher market in Paris "If there's no future for Jews in Europe, there's no future for Europe," (https://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/EU-official-Without-Jews-Europehas-no-future-388688)

 $^{^2\} https://www.jta.org/2019/05/01/global/french-jews-say-officials-are-reluctant-to-call-out-anti-semitism-by-muslims$



antisemitic violence from the extreme right wing also appears to be growing in Germany and elsewhere.³

While not as murderous in action although equally violent rhetorically, antisemitism on the Left also presents a growing threat. The use of violent language and harsh rhetoric, particularly involving Israel, but increasingly invoking traditional antisemitic tropes has poisoned the atmosphere in many places. In the United Kingdom the Labour party has been exposed as a party that, as described by one of its former members is "institutionally antisemitic". ⁴ Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the party has proven himself to be a conduit for antisemitsm, unwilling to face the problem and to lead any initiative against it. Indeed, when the overwhelming majority of British Jews called upon Labour to adopt the International holocaust remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism, Corbyn tried to derail the effort and limit the adoption.⁵

Surveys and statistics supply evidence of this fear. The Fundamental Rights Agency's second survey of European Jews released in November 2018, reveals four key findings

- a) Antisemitism pervades everyday life
- b) Pervasive antisemitism undermines Jews' feelings of safety and security)
- c) Antisemitic harassment is so common that it becomes normalised.
- d) Antisemitic discrimination in key areas of life remains invisible. 6

³ https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/14/world/europe/anti-semitic-crime-germany.html

⁴ https://www.jns.org/mp-joan-ryan-why-she-renounced-anti-semitism-ingrained-in-britains-labour-party/

⁵ https://www.ft.com/content/72e2c5dc-b013-11e8-99ca-68cf89602132

⁶ The complete survey results can be found at https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2018/2nd-survey-discrimination-hate-crime-against-jews



The result is that over 90% of Europe's Jewish population surveyed feel that antisemitism is growing in their countries, and most feel that little or no effort is being made to fight it⁷.

The effects of these actions in the political, judicial, legal and social spheres create a corrosive atmosphere where Jews become afraid to be publicly identified as Jews. The FRA survey clearly pointed this out – over three quarters of the Jews surveyed in France, Denmark, Sweden and Germany "at least occasionally avoid wearing, carrying or displaying items" that might publicly identify them as being Jewish.⁸ And when antisemitsm is identified, the reaction is often a cover up or a refusal to act, as in the recent case at the prestigious Karolinska University Hospital in Stockholm (which is affiliated with institution that grants the Nobel Prize of Medicine). ⁹

In the United States the feeling of comfort that Jews have experienced over recent generations has been shattered by a string of violent antisemitic attacks. The number of hate crimes in the United States has continued to rise over the course of the past several years¹⁰ In 2017, the most recent year for which FBI statistics are available, there were more than 7,100 hate crime

⁷ "Almost 80% do not report serious incidents to the police or any other body. Often this is because they feel nothing will change." (https://fra.europa.eu/en/press-release/2018/persistent-antisemitism-hangs-over-eu)

⁸ https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-experiences-and-perceptions-of-antisemitism-survey_en.pdf

⁹ https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/.premium-anti-semitism-and-a-cover-up-rock-sweden-s-most-prestigious-medical-institute-1.6695780

¹⁰ As defined by the Civil Rights Act of 1968, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Foundation Act of 1994, and the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009, and as identified via the terms of the Hate Crimes Statistics Act of 1990



incidents in the United States.¹¹ 1,749 of these hate crimes were defined as crimes based on religious orientation. Of these, 58.1% of the perpetrators committed their crimes based on antisemitic bias (as opposed to 18.6% based on an Islamophobic bias, 4.3% on anti-Catholic bias, 2.3% anti-Protestant, 1.5% anti-Sikh, etc.).

According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) antisemitic crimes stayed relatively static at extraordinarily high levels in 2017 and 2018 (with 1,986 crimes in 2017 and 1,879 crimes in 2018, as opposed to 941 incidents in 2015). 59 people were subject to violent crimes among the 2018 incidents, which is an increase of 105% over the number of such crimes in 2017. 11 of these individuals were murdered during the October 2018 attack of the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. And most recently there was the antisemitic attack on the Chabad synagogue in Poway, California, in April 2019, during which three people were wounded and one was murdered.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center has discerned three major trends in current antisemitism.

First is that of traditional antisemitism. This is the antisemitism that is sometimes assumed to be the province of right wing extremists, or white supremacists, but is actually wider raging than that and can be found in left wing circles as well. It trades on traditional stereotypes and tropes that are rooted deeply into Western culture and have evidently been lying dormant after

¹¹ According to the Bureau of government Statistics the number could even be higher; a review of data collection procedures found that the number of crimes could be as high as 250,000 because of lack of reporting and/or poor reporting of hate crimes.



States include the shootings at synagogues in Pittsburgh and California, as well as the murder of a gay Jewish college student in California. This followed on the heels of the infamous march in Charlottesville, Virginia where Nazi slogans were chanted. However, this antisemitsm has not been limited to the fringes of society, as last year's elections saw two Republican candidates for Congress (Arthur Jones and John Fitzpatrick) who were outright neo-Nazis and Holocaust deniers. In Germany investigations have revealed right wing extremist networks within the police, and in the United Kingdom the government reports that "the threat from extreme rightwing terrorism has evolved in recent years, and it is growing." ¹² In Austria, a leader of a far right party that had been formed under a cloud of antisemitism and even recently faced charges of antisemitsm in its ranks was, until he was implicated in a financial scandal, a member of the ruling coalition.

Second is that of antisemitsm in the guise of anti-Zionism. Often linked to followers of radical Islam, this version had exploded into violence and murder in Europe, with notable examples including the murders at the Jewish school in Toulouse in 2012, at a Paris kosher market in 2015, the murders at the Jewish Museum of Belgium in 2014, a murder at the synagogue in Copenhagen in Denmark in 2015 and the murder of a Holocaust survivor, again in Paris in 2018. This is only a partial list of the murders of Jews; it does not include the wounded or assaulted,

¹² https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2019/03/19/factsheet-right-wing-terrorism/



including sexual assaults. In the United Kingdom it has become a feature of political discourse, centered around the Labor Party and radical leftist activists. In Sweden the Jewish community of Malmo living in fear from constant threats of physical violence from radical Muslims.

In the United States it had mostly been the province of college activists who have on some campuses targeted Jewish students and staff because of their support of Israel. This has manifested in attempts to create a physically hostile environment while efforts to force universities and colleges into boycotts of Israeli institutions and academics. Recently it has even penetrated into the United States Congress, with freshman Democrats Omar Ilhan and Rashida Tlaib expressing antisemitic comments connected to supporters of Israel.

The third lies in the area of Holocaust distortion, which is frequently allied with extreme nationalistic political movements and ideologies. In doing so traditional antisemitic attitudes are excused and sometimes encouraged to reappear. Examples of this abound in countries like Poland, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Lithuania and Ukraine. Poland has in the last few years been the scene of many antisemitic outbursts by politicians, and these expressions can be found on state media and other influential organs. Recently some of these activities have been exported to Western countries like the United States. In Hungary statues to Nazi era collaborators have been raised by the government and a campaign with antisemitic overtones has targeted a leading liberal Jewish international financier. In Croatia a former government minister turned out to be an apologist for the Ustashe collaborators, and in Ukraine a cult has persisted around Stepan Bandera, whose OUN-B movement initially cooperated with the Nazis and were responsible for the mass murder of Jews and others. In Poland and Ukraine laws have been



passed that forbid shaming or criticizing the collaborators; these laws not only whitewash and protect antisemitic individuals and movements but they also inhibit research and threaten freedom of expression.

Finally, a recent CNN survey showed that 35% of Europeans polled believed that Israel uses the Holocaust to justify it actions¹³

The recent surge in antisemitism from all these streams has been essentially fueled by social media. Without the delivery system of online antisemitism (and all other forms of hate speech), antisemitism would not be flourishing today.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center was a pioneer in monitoring and fighting online antisemitism.

Beginning in the mid-1980's, the Center was the first Human Rights organization to monitor

Digital Hate, even before the coming of the World Wide Web in late 1994. In March 1995,

Stormfront become the first white supremacist site on the World Wide Web, making the

transition from a "BBS" (Digital Bulletin Board System). In 1997, the Center published Racism,

Mayhem and Terrorism — The Emergence of an Online Subculture of Hate, the first of 22

interactive reports which are now titled Digital Terrorism and Hate. (In 2002, the SWC noticed a

convergence of Hate and International Terrorist groups online and added Terrorism to its

monitoring.) In 2005, SWC noted the first hate page on Facebook, leading to the monitoring of

Facebook and other social media platforms as the came online. For the last twenty two years

our Digital Hate and Terrorism Project has produced an annual electronic report of the state of

antisemitism and other forms of extremism online and made it available for policy makers, law

¹³ https://www.timesofisrael.com/cnn-poll-over-20-of-europeans-say-jews-have-too-much-influence-worldwide/



enforcement and educational users. We have published some of the earliest and most important scholarly work on the internet and antisemitsm.¹⁴

A few years ago we began grading the major tech companies on their approaches to this issue, and have consequently created strong working relationships with them, leading to some significant successes in getting hateful material pulled down; but we have also noted great difficulty in moving beyond singular cases and achieving the establishment of or living up to corporate standards.¹⁵

Over the last few years the Wiesenthal Center has been involved in significant efforts in raising awareness about the pernicious presence of antisemitism and in fighting it on multiple fronts. The Center's Director of International Affairs, Dr. Shimon Samuels, has forged a strong relationship with UNESCO, which has led to joint conferences and exhibitions, including the acclaimed travelling exhibit *People, Book, Land: The 3500 Year Relationship of the Jewish People with the Holy Land,* and has, in his role as the SWC's Representative to the United Nations in Geneva, been active in countering antisemitism there.

¹⁴ Mark Weitzman, `The Internet is our Sword': Aspects of Online Antisemitism in, Remembering For the Future: The Holocaust In An Age Of Genocide, John K. Roth and Elisabeth Maxwell eds., pp. 911-925 and also Mark Weitzman, Antisemitism and Terrorism on the Electronic Highway in Terrorism and the Internet, ed. Hans-Liudger Dienel, vol.67 in the NATO Science for Peace and Security Series - E: Human and Societal Dynamics, pp. 7-24

¹⁵ See attached Appendix for the most recent report card as well as examples from our latest report.



Chief Nazi Hunter Dr. Efraim Zuroff has been the major voice and activist in bringing the last Nazi's to justice, which has triggered public debates and renewed awareness in many European countries.

Mark Weitzman, the Center's Director of Government Affairs and Representative to the United Nations in New York was responsible for introducing and steering to adoption (with Romanian Ambassador Mihnea Constantinescu, the then Chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) the IHRA's *Working Definition of Antisemitism* and was also the lead author of *IHRA's Working Definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion*. He has also been involved with the OSCE and the UN in New York in efforts to counter antisemitsm and is editing and publishing next year a new volume on antisemitism, which is geared to becoming the major college and university text on the subject for the next generation.

Recommendations

The following are a brief list of recommendations that focus on how the United Nations could more effectively be mobilized to fighting antisemitism.

- 1) The UN should formally adopt the IHRA definitions
- 2) The UN should appoint a high-level point person to monitor, report and recommend action regarding antisemitism
- There should be an annual report on antisemitism, gathering data from all member countries
- 4) The UNHCR must stop it's barrage of non-stop anti-Israel moves



- 5) UNRWA's must revise its curriculum that won't mention Israel in its textbooks but holds up terrorists as heroes to emulate.
- 6) All UN staff, including UNWRA need to be trained to recognize and required to fight antisemitism.
- 7) UNESCO must resist all attempts to distort history for political purposes such as that are aimed at erasing the Jewish (and Christian) connection to the Holy Land and a creating a false narrative that claims historic religious sites as exclusively Muslim.
- 8) UN should support and distribute UNESCO publications on antisemitism, such as the publication Addressing anti-semitism through education: guidelines for policymakers.



Appendix













































