

Combating Antisemitism in the Context of Football

Panel discussion on 21 June 2024 in Berlin, Germany

Summary document prepared by the
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

1. Background

Recent years have seen a resurgence of antisemitism across Europe and globally, manifesting in hate speech, vandalism, physical attacks and online harassment. The prevalence of antisemitism in the form of chants, gestures and attacks at stadiums and sports events underscores the ongoing challenge of such discrimination and violence, which is often exacerbated by a lack of measures to combat it and of awareness among sports organizations and fans regarding the extent and severity of antisemitic acts. As the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, [stated](#) in September 2023: "Antisemitism has been a scourge for generations. Its deep scars cannot be healed. But we can, and must, learn from them."



In light of [UN Human Rights Council Resolution 54/25](#), which stresses the importance of combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in sport, and in observance of the International Day for Countering Hate Speech ([UN General Assembly Resolution 75/309](#)), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the [World Jewish Congress](#) co-organized a panel discussion on "Combating Antisemitism in the Context of Football" on 21 June 2024, in the context of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Championship in Berlin, Germany.



This document summarizes key points and recommendations for actions to combat antisemitism and all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and religious intolerance that emerged during the event. It featured opening remarks by the co-organizers and representatives of UEFA and a football club as well as two thematic panel discussions, one focusing on structural conditions and human rights issues in combating antisemitism in football, and another panel highlighting practical approaches and successful initiatives that individual clubs and athletes are engaged in.

2. Opening remarks on combating antisemitism in football and sports

Speakers highlighted that football and other sports may be powerful tools for shining light on specific human rights issues, touching people's hearts and minds. Sports serve not only as meeting grounds but also as intervention platforms where real conversations can challenge prejudice and foster understanding. Every human being should be protected, yet antisemitism is still a reality in society and sports. To counter antisemitism, some football clubs have examined their own history and have organized educational trips to Holocaust memorial sites. Voltaire was quoted from his book "L'Ingénu", noting that history is only the register of crimes.



Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and religious intolerance, including antisemitism, have been persistent issues in football and sports worldwide, undermining the inclusive spirit that sports are meant to embody. There are not only isolated incidents; they are symptoms of systemic and structural racism embedded within the social fabrics of societies. These violations are often perpetuated by long-standing practices and attitudes that exclude or marginalize certain groups. From the underrepresentation of minorities in leadership roles to the differential treatment of players based on racial or religious grounds, these issues are therefore also reflected in the fabric of the sports world.

Athletes of various racial or ethnic groups and religious affiliations play a vital role in challenging and overcoming these prejudices, both through their performances and their activism. However, they also face significant challenges, including targeted abuse and discrimination. Addressing these issues requires more than just punitive measures; it demands a comprehensive overhaul of the systems that allow such discrimination to thrive, ensuring that equality and inclusivity are not just ideals, but also realities in the sports community.



During the UEFA European Football Championship 2024, thousands of fans were celebrating and supporting their teams. At the same time, Jewish communities need to be and feel safe. The Olympia Stadium Berlin has a complex and painful history, as a stage for the propagation of antisemitic ideologies in the 1930s and 1940s. Yet, this space needs to be reclaimed and transformed into a beacon of hope, honouring the victims of past atrocities and forging a future free from the shadows of intolerance, discrimination, xenophobia and violence.

3. Panel on structural conditions and the question of human rights

During the first panel discussion, participants shared perspectives on the intersection of sports and the fight against antisemitism, including racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and religious intolerance. The panellists emphasized the importance of remembering the Holocaust and ensuring that such atrocities never occur again. The panel focused on structural conditions of antisemitism and related human rights questions.



The persistence of racial slurs, antisemitic chants and xenophobic behaviour, despite numerous campaigns and penalties, reflects the deeper, systemic nature of the problem. Structural racism in sports manifests in policies and practices that disadvantage athletes, limit their opportunities, and perpetuate a culture of exclusion.

Antisemitic behaviour in football and sports in general is a widespread problem that manifests in various forms, including offensive chants, bullying, online harassment and discriminatory actions. Antisemitism frequently targets Jewish religious attire, such as yarmulkes and tzitzit, using these symbols to demean and discriminate against Jewish individuals and communities, athletes or spectators. The impact of these behaviours extends beyond Jewish athletes and affects the entire sports community, contributing to an atmosphere of intolerance and division.

Participants also highlighted that antisemitism in football and sports across Germany and Europe has been a persistent issue, reflecting broader societal prejudices. Historically, Jewish players, fans and clubs have faced discrimination, exclusion and violence. For example, during the Nazi regime, Jewish sports clubs like the Berlin-based *Bar-Kochba* were banned, and Jewish athletes were marginalized or outright barred from participating in sports. This erasure from mainstream sports culture had a devastating impact on Jewish communities, and the effects linger to this day. Even after World War II, the reintegration of Jewish clubs into the sports landscape had been slow and fraught with challenges.

The prevention element was also highlighted by participants. Football and sports can play a vital role in combating antisemitism by promoting unity and inclusivity, while emphasizing the importance of acknowledging and confronting one's own biases and prejudices. Prevention can also be achieved through collaboration, while highlighting the need for personal reflection, introspection and learning from history in order to effectively combat antisemitism together.

Human rights mechanisms are important tools in the fight against antisemitism, providing both remedies for victims and frameworks for the prevention of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#) obliges States Parties to confront and dismantle systemic racism in every sphere, including sports, by implementing effective policies, legal frameworks and oversight. In addition, the [UN Human Rights Committee](#) and the [Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief](#) monitor the implementation of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), the [1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief](#) and the “[Faith for Rights](#)” framework, which cover the fundamental freedom of everyone to adopt, have and practice their religion or belief free from coercion, discrimination or intolerance. These human rights frameworks empower affected individuals and communities, promote justice and seek to drive systemic change in the global effort to eradicate racism and religious intolerance in sports and beyond.

The international human rights mechanisms also demand proactive measures from States to foster environments that reject bigotry and intolerance. For example, UN Special Rapporteurs take up individual cases in their communications with governments and analyse trends during their country visits or thematic reports and press releases. In December 2023, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief and two senior UN officials [decried](#) rising antisemitism and Islamophobia around the world and strongly condemned all harmful acts and expressions of religious hatred and intolerance that engender deep hurt and fear at individual and community levels. However, it was heartening that people from different faiths have come together to affirm their shared humanity; such efforts must be supported, celebrated and multiplied, their statement added.

4. Panel on good practices from the field in the fight against antisemitism through sport

The participants in the second panel discussion highlighted real-world examples of how sports entities and individuals can effectively combat antisemitism and foster a culture of respect and inclusion.

For example, the football club 1. FC Nürnberg has been conducting educational activities, including about the life story of its Jewish former trainer Jenö Konrad, who had coached 1. FC Nürnberg from 1930 to 1932. The club invited his 94-year-old daughter to its events and has also involved its football fans, for example with a scarf featuring the picture of Jenö Konrad and the slogan “Together against antisemitism”.





The toolbox of educational projects also included visits to local synagogues as well as cooperating with Maccabi Nürnberg on the “Jenö Konrad Cup” which combines historical education with sportsmanship. Another example outlined by participants were guided visits to museums, such as the Holocaust Museum of Thessaloniki in order to remember individuals and learn from the past. In addition, Borussia Dortmund had organized educational trips to various memorial sites.

Football players themselves were also involved, for example through friendly games hosted in Thessaloniki by Aris FC with Maccabi Haifa as well as meetings with other players. Participants stated that it was heartwarming to see that there are also non-Jewish voices who publicly speak out against antisemitism and who protect Jewish players and supporters. In this context it was also questioned if the negative framing of the existing “No to racism” campaign was a good slogan or whether it would be preferable to convey a more positive message.

The overarching aim should be to build bridges between sports and Jewish organizations in combating antisemitism (see [“Building Bridges: Survey Insights on Combating Antisemitism Through Football”](#), published in 2024 by the non-governmental organization What Matters in the context of the European Union-funded project BRIDGES, a cooperation between the World Jewish Congress, CEJI and What Matters).

5. Closing remarks

All panellists, the moderator, co-organizers, UEFA, sport clubs and participants were wholeheartedly thanked for such a fascinating and thought-provoking discussion. The event in Berlin on 21 June 2024 was an excellent opportunity for peer-to-peer learning on how to combat antisemitism in football, particularly in the European context, and how to address the negative implications for athletes and communities of racism, racial discrimination and religious intolerance.



A key advocacy message, in a positive and proactive sense, would be the motto of the event: “Together Through Sport”.

The panel discussion was preceded by a guided tour of the impactful exhibition "[SPORTS. CROWDS. POWER](#)" at Berlin's Olympic Park, presented to the participants by members of the non-governmental organization What Matters. The exhibition, a joint project with the Berlin Sports Museum and supported by the World Jewish Congress, delves into the complex history of football during the Nazi era, highlighting how the sport was manipulated during the national socialist-era for propaganda purposes and how it played a role in both uniting and dividing people. Through poignant displays about the history of Jewish sporting clubs and stories of persecuted athletes, visitors were encouraged to reflect on the broader societal implications of sports both historically and in the present day. The guided tour through the exhibition, two panel discussions and subsequent match of the UEFA European Championship 2024 between Austria and Poland at Berlin Olympia Stadium on 21 June 2024 was compared to creating an arch between the past and present.

Sports has the power to bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds, fostering unity and shared joy. However, when the ugliness of racial or religious intolerance infiltrates this sphere, it corrupts the very essence of what sport represents: fair play, mutual respect and the celebration of human potential. The fight against antisemitism in sports is not merely about addressing discriminatory chants or gestures. It is about challenging and dismantling systemic prejudices that manifest both overtly and insidiously. Antisemitism and all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and religious intolerance undermine the principles of equality, dignity and respect that are the cornerstones of human rights. As such, antisemitism is not just an affront to Jewish communities; it is an assault on our collective humanity, breeding division, intolerance and violence. Its presence in any form in sports is a stark reminder of the work all stakeholders must tirelessly pursue.

6. Follow-up recommendations

- There must be **zero tolerance for antisemitism** in football and sports in general. Human rights considerations should be central to combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and religious intolerance as well as incitement to hatred or violence.
- **States, sports governing bodies, sports clubs, associations and federations and other actors have a responsibility to uphold human rights standards** and ensure that each participant is protected from all forms of discrimination. This includes enforcing strict anti-discrimination rules and sanctions for those who perpetrate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and religious intolerance, including antisemitism, as well as incitement to hatred or violence.
- A **shared commitment** to taking concrete steps towards eradicating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and religious intolerance, including antisemitism, in sports is critical. It is therefore vital to establish policies that fight all forms of discrimination, with clear and enforceable actions.
- **Policies** should include support mechanisms for victims, recognizing the emotional and psychological toll of antisemitism on athletes and fans. This

includes providing accessible channels for reporting incidents, offering psychological and legal support to victims, and ensuring that those who come forward are protected from retaliation or reprisals.

- These **incidents** should be monitored, and perpetrators must be held accountable for their actions. There should be a remedial process that is effective and transparent.
- Policies should also facilitate a **diverse and inclusive approach** to sports through tailored programmes, initiatives and campaigns, etc.
- **Human rights education** and awareness raising campaigns are essential to learn from history and to prevent violations from happening, especially to learn about the Holocaust and to never forget.
- **Everyone** must refrain from advocating for national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to violence, hostility or discrimination (see [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), article 20).
- **Political and religious leaders** should speak out firmly and promptly against hate speech and they should make clear that violence cannot be justified by prior provocation (see ["Faith for Rights"](#) framework).
- **National human rights institutions and civil society groups**, including faith-based actors, should create and support mechanisms and dialogues to foster intercultural and interreligious understanding and peer-to-peer learning.
- **Digital platforms** should enforce content moderation policies on hateful content in accordance with international human rights standards, as well as listen to those most affected by online hate speech and provide better channels for raising concerns that result in prompt action.
- **Media outlets** should take responsibility for how they report on incidents involving racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and religious intolerance as well as incitement to hatred or violence in football and sports in general.
- **Voluntary professional codes of conduct** for the media and journalists should reflect the principle of equality, and effective steps should be taken to promulgate and implement such codes (see [Rabat Plan of Action](#), paras. 58-59). In line with the [Camden Principles](#) (principle 9), all media should consider:
 - Taking care to report in context and in a factual and sensitive manner, while ensuring that acts of discrimination are brought to the attention of the public.
 - Being alert to the danger of furthering discrimination or negative stereotypes of individuals and groups in the media.
 - Avoiding unnecessary references to race, religion, gender and other group characteristics that may promote intolerance.
 - Raising awareness of the harm caused by discrimination and negative stereotyping.
 - Reporting on different groups or communities and giving their members the opportunity to speak and to be heard in a way that promotes a better understanding of them, while at the same time reflecting the perspectives of those groups or communities.

Annex: Programme of the panel discussions on 21 June 2024

Opening remarks:

- **Julien Zylberstein**, Union of European Football Associations, Managing Director of European Affairs and Governance
- **Thomas Herrich**, Hertha BSC Berlin, Chief Executive Officer
- **Dr. Leon Saltiel**, World Jewish Congress, Coordinator for Combating Antisemitism
- **Peggy Hicks**, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Director of the Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division

Panel I: Combating Antisemitism in the Context of Football: Structural Conditions and the Question of Human Rights

- **Rabbi Alex Goldberg**, Dean of Religious Life at the University of Surrey & Chair of English Football Association's Faith Network
- **Dr. Vanessa Rau**, Research fellow, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity
- **Dr. Pavel Brunssen**, Expert on Antisemitism in Sports, University of Heidelberg
- **Prof. Nazila Ghanea**, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief
- **Inger Schaap**, Historian and moderator of the panel discussion

Panel II: From the Field—Best Practices in the Fight Against Antisemitism Through Sport

- **Agisilaos Toumazatos**, General Director, Aris FC Thessaloniki
- **Katharina Fritsch**, Head of Community & Membership at 1. FC Nürnberg
- **Daniel Loercher**, Spokesperson for Anti-Discrimination and the Fight Against Antisemitism at Borussia Dortmund / Senior Consultant, World Jewish Congress
- **Karin Sendel**, Football Player at Hapoel Tel Aviv / former Israeli International, Chairwoman of Israel Football Players Organization
- **Inger Schaap**, Historian and moderator of the panel discussion

Closing remarks:

- **Michael Wiener**, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Rule of Law, Equality and Non-discrimination Branch