



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
4 April 2019

English only

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## Human Rights Council

### Fortieth session

25 February–22 March 2019

Agenda item 4

**Human rights situations that require the Council's attention**

### **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.

[21 February 2019]

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



## Submission of the Institute for NGO Research Antisemitism in Sweden

Antisemitism is a major and growing problem in the world, in Europe, and in Sweden. In September 2018, Secretary-General António Guterres expressed his concern stating that “the origins of the United Nations itself are rooted in the need to learn the lessons of the Holocaust,” and that being “true to our Charter means combating antisemitism and hatred with all our energy and will.” According to the 2018 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and its survey of antisemitism, the largest of its kind encompassing 96% of the Jewish population in Europe, 9 out of 10 Swedish Jews perceive that antisemitism has increased. As stated in this study, Sweden is among the countries where the Jewish population is the least satisfied with how the government combats antisemitism and provides for the security concerns of the Jewish community.

Sweden is often hailed as a highly idealistic country keen on safekeeping and promoting human rights. Sweden itself states that it aspires to “be a clear voice for human rights around the world – not just in words but also in actions.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Swedish initiative helped lead to the establishment of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in 1998.

However, Sweden does not adhere to the full definition of antisemitism that it helped create with the founding of IHRA.<sup>2</sup> This definition importantly includes: “Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor”; “Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation”; and “Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis” in its definition of antisemitism.

Some measures against antisemitism do exist in Sweden, and in the Prime Minister’s Statement of Government Policy (January 21, 2019) it was stated that “wherever antisemitism exists, and however it’s expressed, it shall be addressed and fought.”<sup>3</sup> This was followed by an introduction to new measures to counteract antisemitism such as visits to Holocaust memorial sites around Europe, the opening of a new Holocaust museum, and announcing Sweden as host of a conference on the Holocaust in 2020.

Lamentably, the overwhelming focus on the Holocaust, and the kind of antisemitism manifested before and during, results in the full scope of the current threat facing the Jewish people being neglected and, consequently, left unaddressed. In Sweden, antisemitism can be seen stemming from across the political spectrum, where the far-left, the far-right, radical Islamism, and general ignorance converge and constitute the modern threat to the Jewish population in Sweden. As Moshe Kantor, president of the European Jewish Congress, articulated, “The challenges that the Jewish community in Sweden face today are sadly indicative of far wider phenomena taking place across Europe.”<sup>4</sup>

In Sweden, there is a tremendous hesitation to speak out against even the most blatant antisemitism when it comes from purported progressive political groups or members of another minority group. In a country keen on promoting its human rights expertise, the fear of being accused of intolerance has paralyzed Swedish leaders from properly addressing antisemitism and all its vile manifestations. As a result, Sweden is failing its Jewish citizens

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<sup>1</sup> Sweden, “Sweden and Human Rights,” <https://sweden.se/society/sweden-and-human-rights/>.

<sup>2</sup> International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, “Working Definition of Antisemitism,” <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism>.

<sup>3</sup> Government Offices of Sweden, “Statement of Government Policy,” January 21, 2019: <https://www.government.se/speeches/20192/01/statement-of-government-policy-21-january-2019/>.

<sup>4</sup> Cnaan Liphshiz, “Caught between jihadists and neo-Nazis, Swedish Jews fear for their future,” July 20, 2018” <https://www.jta.org/2018/07/10/global/caught-between-jihadists-and-neo-nazis-swedish-jews-fear-for-their-future>.

and further contributing to the deteriorating relationship between Sweden, the Jewish people, and the Jewish State.

In addition to antisemitism present within Sweden, the Swedish government also provides funding to radical anti-Israel NGOs that routinely use antisemitic motifs in their demonization of the Jewish State and the Jewish people. For instance, from 2014-2017 Sweden served as the lead donor of the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Secretariat (Secretariat), a joint initiative by the governments of Denmark, Switzerland, Sweden, and the Netherlands. During its tenure, the Secretariat funneled over \$13 million (2013-2016)<sup>5</sup> to Palestinian NGOs that promote antisemitism, the elimination of Israel, the so-called “right of resistance” (a euphemism for terrorism), violent imagery, and anti-Israel national origin discrimination. Several of these groups also have links to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a terrorist organization designated as such by the EU, the United States of America, Canada, Australia, and Israel.<sup>6</sup>

Contrary to NGO claims that they are engaging in “legitimate criticism” of Israel, the NGO rhetoric, publications, and activities often violate accepted standards, including the IHRA and EU definitions of antisemitism that Sweden has signed and endorsed. Regardless of other well-intended policies, Sweden is, by funding these NGOs, de facto subsidizing antisemitism and contributing to an environment of hate and incitement that endangers Jews worldwide.

The issue is further illustrated by the state-owned and taxpayer-funded publication *OmVärlden*, which readily expresses ill-disguised hostility towards Jews under this same mantra of “legitimate criticism” and “anti-Zionism.”

In the summer of 2018, just before Swedish national elections and following a series of articles critical of Swedish aid policies, *OmVärlden* published an excessive number of articles (23! in total) attacking the independent research institute NGO Monitor (a project of our organization). NGO Monitor has for years called on governments to carefully review funding to NGOs and institute best practices of transparency and oversight to ensure funding is not provided to groups with ties to terror and those that promote hatred and antisemitism. The article series was produced by two journalists with a background in extreme political activism and antagonism against Israel.

In a seemingly desperate attempt to defend Sweden’s tainted funding policies, *OmVärlden*’s articles consist almost entirely of innuendo, factual inaccuracies, and, most alarmingly, antisemitic motifs reminiscent of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion (spider web, conspiracy theories).

Swedish funding mechanisms and *OmVärlden*’s article series are two separate yet linked examples reflective of the wider antisemitic phenomenon that exists Sweden. While these specific instances may not be direct or deliberate, Sweden is, in fact, fueling and intensifying the already hostile and discriminatory environment for Jews worldwide. The UNHRC should encourage Sweden to uphold the UN values of combating racism and antisemitism and review both its domestic and international aid policies regarding the promotion of antisemitism and combatting racism.

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<sup>5</sup> NGO Monitor, “NGOs and Antisemitism,” <https://www.ngo-monitor.org/key-issues/ngos-and-antisemitism/government-enabling-of-antisemitism/>.

<sup>6</sup> NGO Monitor, “Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Secretariat: Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, and the Netherlands,” October 8, 2018: [https://www.ngo-monitor.org/funder/human\\_rights\\_and\\_international\\_humanitarian\\_law\\_secretariat\\_denmark\\_sweden\\_switzerland\\_and\\_the\\_netherlands0/](https://www.ngo-monitor.org/funder/human_rights_and_international_humanitarian_law_secretariat_denmark_sweden_switzerland_and_the_netherlands0/).