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Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance: follow-up to 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.

[23 May 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



Adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism

For 20 years, the Institute has studied and analyzed the presence of antisemitism within the human rights and humanitarian community. Antisemitism from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has become an enduring feature of political discourse about Israel and Zionism – paralleling a resurgence of physical violence against Jews over the past decade. Many institutions and individuals who claim to represent human rights and humanitarian values instead promulgate antisemitic rhetoric and tropes and condone antisemitism from executives and staff, with little to no repercussions. These organizations also consistently dismiss considerations of antisemitism as a human rights issue.

This dynamic is prevalent, characterizing the most powerful global organizations and numerous NGOs active that receive EU- and European-government funding and that are active within the UN system. At the same time, antisemitic incidents continue to be met with apathy and the absence of accountability and public debate, in particular, from the institutions and governments that fund these NGOs and from their supporters.

In response to the increase of antisemitism worldwide, many governments have recognized the importance of a consensus definition of this phenomenon. The most widely accepted definition, adopted in May 2016, is that of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism. According to IHRA, “Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

Crucially, the IHRA definition includes examples of the “new” antisemitism, such as singling out and blaming the Jewish State, denying Jews a nation state and delegitimizing the existence of Israel as the Jewish State, and disguising antisemitism as the fight against Israel. In this respect, the definition articulates what is and what is not antisemitism, as well as how to distinguish legitimate criticism of Israel from antisemitism.

For example, over the last two years, numerous political NGOs involved in anti-Israel advocacy and their UN allies have issued publications accusing Israel of “apartheid.” This offensive term is used to advance a narrative of unparalleled Israeli immorality, and to promote demonization through BDS and lawfare, including in the International Criminal Court (ICC). Critically, these actions violate a core example in the IHRA definition of antisemitism which states: “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.” Unsurprisingly, the NGOs that have been utilizing apartheid terminology also strongly oppose the IHRA definition.

The IHRA framework has been adopted by dozens of governments and hundreds, if not thousands of intergovernmental and local institutions. In addition, as clearly expressed in an unprecedented report on antisemitism, the UN’s Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed, wrote, “The working definition of antisemitism developed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance can offer valuable guidance for identifying antisemitism in its various forms...the Special Rapporteur recommends its use as a critical non-legal educational tool that should be applied.”

Some governments have gone farther than mere adoption. In January 2021, the European Commission published a “Handbook for the practical use of the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism,” which relates the definition “to the contexts of real-world antisemitic incidents and crimes” and illustrates “good practices in the application” of the definition. A section is devoted to how the definition can “help direct funding to civil society organisations and human rights organisations.”

In contrast, a number of countries that are members of the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation have shamefully not only failed to combat antisemitism, but have regularly encouraged attacks on Jews and disseminate antisemitic propaganda. Claiming one is simply engaging in “criticism” of Israel is no excuse to employ virulently antisemitic

imagery and tropes, nor to encourage and perpetrate harassment and violence against Jewish communities.

Many of the NGOs that violate these guidelines are still receiving governmental funding, regardless of their contributions to antisemitism. Despite the significant progress in European countries of acknowledging the evil of antisemitism and the need to allocate meaningful levels of government funding and resources to combat it, some countries have fallen short in some aspects. As documented by NGO Monitor, a project of the Institute, these governments, as well as the European Union, have given hundreds of millions of dollars over the past twenty years to organizations that engage in and promote blatant antisemitism as defined by IHRA. These governments and the EU often justify such funding by claiming that the recipient organizations are engaged in advancing human rights and humanitarian objectives, or that grants are provided for projects and not for organizations. These excuses are unacceptable—any group that engages in antisemitism can in no way to be said to be promoting human rights or humanitarian goals.

In the Institute's assessment, the IHRA definition can also help address the challenges posed by deeply ingrained NGO antisemitism. The Institute recommends that governments integrate the IHRA definition into funding mechanisms, alongside similar conditions already found in budgets and grant contracts (addressing discrimination, terror, hate speech), and ensure that potential grantees are aware of and bound by these requirements. Governments also need to develop rigorous procedures for vetting of potential NGO partners and/ or grantees, as well as for complaints, investigations, and sanctions if concerns arise during the contract period. The same guidelines should also apply across all UN agencies and frameworks.

The Institute does not claim that such policies will erase the twisted hatred of Jews and Israel that inspire NGO antisemitism. However, implementation can make a major difference in pushing antisemitism further to the margins of acceptable discourse and in ensuring that governments are fighting, instead of enabling, antisemitic expression.
