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## Antisemitism and the UN

International law provides a wide number of mechanisms to combat racism, discrimination, and hatred. UN agencies report racism and allocate resources to projects endowing the principles of tolerance and acceptance of diversity. Some of these actions also target antisemitism, or at least some of its manifestations. The question of antisemitism is by no means missing from this framework. The UN General Assembly and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights discuss antisemitism in annual reports, which do not fail to condemn episodes of Jew-hatred. UNESCO invests in efforts for Holocaust remembrance and funds projects for education against antisemitism. Even the UN Secretary General, on occasion of his recent visit to Israel, warned that “antisemitism is alive and well.”<sup>1</sup> So why is antisemitism on the rise? Is it a mere question of policy efficacy? More provocatively, why does the world need another organization, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), to address Holocaust denial, trivialization, and antisemitism? Shouldn’t the UN and its agencies serve as the appropriate forum for monitoring, denouncing, and combating Jew-hatred as a core question of human rights? Finally, what is the purpose of mobilizing actors (most of them Jewish organizations, by the way) for combating antisemitism, when there are solid human rights NGOs that have progressively consolidated their reputation and prominent work for protecting fundamental rights?

This paper analyzes how the UN deals with antisemitism, which is either condemned as a form of Holocaust denial, or is relegated as a phenomenon existing merely in extreme right-wing and racist speech. When other manifestations of antisemitism are acknowledged, mostly in connection with the Arab-Israeli conflict, they are “diluted” in a variety of hatred and bigotry against religious communities, including Christianophobia and Islamophobia. The final part of the paper will address some policy advice.

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<sup>1</sup> See A. Fulbright, “UN Chief in Jerusalem: Calls for Israel’s Destruction are ‘Modern anti-Semitism’,” *Times of Israel*, August 28, 2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/un-chief-calls-for-israels-destruction-are-modern-anti-semitism/>; and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’ speech during the press conference at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial on August 28, 2017, <http://webtv.un.org/watch/antonio-guterres-un-secretary-general-voices-commitment-to-fight-anti-semitism-at-yad-vashem-holocaust-memorial-israel-press-conference-28-august-2017/5557812231001/?term>.

## The UN Policy on Antisemitism

Since 9/11, the conflicts in the Middle East have played a major role in the intensifying religious fundamentalism and anti-religious bigotry. Islamist rhetoric fuels antisemitism<sup>2</sup> and develops anti-Christianity as a result of ideological views on the Western world, whereas Islamophobia grows in the West, which manifests in perceptions of Muslim minorities.<sup>3</sup>

UN agencies have consistently dealt with novel forms of bigotry and hatred directed against religious groups, and in this context, the UN acknowledges and condemns antisemitism. At times, the UN has also pointed to an increasing antisemitic manifestations connected to the developments in the Middle East. More often, antisemitism is mentioned in the several occasions and activities dedicated to Holocaust remembrance and condemned when manifested in its most traditional forms, typical of the extreme right.

It appears, however, that antisemitism has been relegated to a mere phenomenon of hatred connected with the political extreme right, emphasized in its manifestation in the form of Holocaust denial and diluted in the ambiguous formula “antisemitism, islamophobia, and christianophobia,” which is usually mentioned in relation to the Middle East. Its most contemporary and pernicious manifestations, which are inherently connected to the Arab-Israeli conflict, are consistently neglected. A cautious approach to the matter is necessary given the controversial topic, but this does not justify the fact that the documents dealing with antisemitism have progressively eliminated the word “Jew” or “Judaism.” Finally, UN agencies fail to condemn specific manifestations of antisemitism, while mentioning the abstract phenomenon, they avoid any controversy that practical examples may lead to.

This evolution is evident in the work of the General Assembly, UNESCO, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. E. Webman, “The Challenge of Assessing Arab/Islamic Antisemitism,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 5 (2010): 677–97.

<sup>3</sup> Back in 2005, Matti Bunzl explored the connection between antisemitism and anti-Zionism, and he draws a distinction between antisemitism and Islamophobia as phenomena, even if connected by the developments in the Middle East. Cf. M. Bunzl, “Between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Some Thoughts on the New Europe,” *American Ethnologist* 32, no. 4 (2005): 499–508.

## The General Assembly

The General Assembly has adopted a number of resolutions that directly or indirectly tackle the issue of antisemitism, defining the general policy of UN agencies on this issue. From an initial recognition of antisemitism as a result of the world's development in the Middle East, the General Assembly has devoted major attention to Holocaust denial and extremist, far-right hate speech, while even the reference to the word Jew has progressively disappeared. Furthermore, the attention to Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment as a consequence of perceptions regarding Middle East conflicts is far more extensive than any reference to antisemitism.

In 2004, the General assembly adopted Resolution 59/199,<sup>4</sup> which condemns religious intolerance and “recognizes with deep concern the overall rise in instances of intolerance and violence directed against members of many religious communities in various parts of the world, including cases motivated by Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and Christianophobia.”<sup>5</sup>

Subsequently, the General Assembly has adopted a number of resolutions recognizing the importance of Holocaust remembrance and denouncing Holocaust denial.

A major step was the adoption in 2005 of Resolution 60/7,<sup>6</sup> which establishes January 27 as International Holocaust Remembrance Day, “*Rejects any denial of the Holocaust as an historical event, either in full or part*”<sup>7</sup> and “*Condemns without reserve all manifestations of religious intolerance, incitement, harassment or violence against persons or communities based on ethnic origin or religious belief, wherever they occur.*”<sup>8</sup> Tellingly, the words antisemitism, Judaeophobia, or Jew-hatred, the wicked forces that led to the Holocaust, do not even appear in the document. Two years later, the UN established “The Holocaust and the UN Outreach Program” with Resolution 61/255 of 2007,<sup>9</sup> which “*condemns without any reservation any denial of the Holocaust,*” and “*urges all Member States un-*

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Resolution 59/199, “Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance,” adopted by the General Assembly on December 20, 2004, [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/59/199](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/59/199).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., par. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Resolution 60/7, “On the Holocaust Remembrance,” adopted by the General Assembly on November 1, 2005, <https://www.un.org/en/holocaustremembrance/docs/res607.shtml>.

<sup>7</sup> Resolution 60/7, par. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., par. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Resolution 61/255 “On Holocaust Denial,” adopted by the General Assembly on January 26, 2007, <https://www.un.org/en/holocaustremembrance/docs/res61.shtml>.

reservedly to reject any denial of the Holocaust as a historical event, either in full or in part, or any activities to this end.”<sup>10</sup> Even in this document, direct mention of antisemitism or other forms of Jew-hatred is omitted.

The other relevant step was the adoption of Resolution 69/160 of 2014,<sup>11</sup> which condemns the glorification of Nazism and denounces neo-Nazism and other nationalist ideologies. The resolution does not mention the word “Jew” even once, whereas it includes expression such as “victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the Second World War by the Nazi regime.”<sup>12</sup> The omission of any reference to antisemitism is particularly deplorable since the document refers to the 2001 Durban Conference, whose goal was to establish a world platform for combating racism and xenophobia but instead was misappropriated by groups that promoted virulent anti-Israeli narrative including antisemitic motives.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, Resolution 68/150 of 2013, which also condemns neo-Nazism, does not once mention the word “Jew” or “antisemitism.”<sup>14</sup>

Antisemitism is therefore referred to in relation to Islamophobia, Christianophobia, and bigotry, whereas it disappears even when the focus is Holocaust remembrance, Holocaust denial, or the resurgence of Nazi ideologies.

## UNESCO

The major focus on Holocaust remembrance is reflected also in UNESCO, which carries out considerable actions for preserving the memory of the Holocaust and

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**10** Ibid., par. 1.

**11** Cf. Resolution 69/160, “On Combating Glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and Other Practices that Contribute to Fuelling Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance,” adopted by the General Assembly on December 18, 2014, <http://undocs.org/en/A/RES/69/160>.

**12** Ibid., par. 13.

**13** For a thorough recount of the happenings during the 2001 Durban Conference from a direct witness, see D. Porat, “Another Kind of Attack on Israel and the Jewish Nation: The First Anniversary of the UN World Conference Against Racism in South Africa,” *Kivunim Hadashim* 7 (2002): 51–60 [Hebrew].

**14** Cf. Resolution 68/150, “Combating Glorification of Nazism and Other Practices that Contribute to Fuelling Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance,” adopted by the General Assembly on December 18, 2013, <https://tandis.odihr.pl/handle/20.500.12389/21964>.

educating for tolerance and equality.<sup>15</sup> In this framework, UNESCO tends to address antisemitism only contingently; in other words the phenomenon is mentioned usually in the frame of activities organized in partnership with other institutions. For instance, in 2009, UNESCO organized the conference on Combating Intolerance, Exclusion and Violence through Holocaust Education, whose proceedings refer to different “dimensions of antisemitism,”<sup>16</sup> including racial antisemitism, Christian anti-Judaism (blood libel), Holocaust denial,<sup>17</sup> as well as anti-Zionism and anti-Israel speech (such as accusation of apartheid).<sup>18</sup> Yet, the last two phenomena are not addressed by policy advice or operational lines.

Even more striking is the study issued in 2015 on Holocaust teaching in textbooks,<sup>19</sup> which reveals that in certain states, both Central European and Middle-East countries, the Holocaust is exploited to advance anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli sentiment through minimization, trivialization, and veiled reference to conspiracy theories.<sup>20</sup> While pointing to a certain vision of the Holocaust in the analyzed countries, two points are significant: first, certain countries, directly involved in the conflict with Israel, and promoting forms of antisemitic speech such as Iran, are missing in the study; secondly, no measure was taken to lead the change.

Between 2016 and 2017, UNESCO organized a series of events focusing on how to combat on antisemitism, also in cooperation with other institutions,

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**15** Resolution 34c/61 on Holocaust Remembrance of 2007 reaches out to the Secretary General in order to foster inter-institutional cooperation for advancing Holocaust Remembrance. Cf. Resolution 34c/61, “Holocaust Remembrance,” adopted by UNESCO on November 1, 2007, during the 34<sup>th</sup> Conference, October 16, 2007–November 2, 2007, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000156046.page=78>.

**16** Cf. the presentation by OSCE’s ODIHR Adviser on Antisemitism Issues, N. Hinterleitner, “Combating anti-Semitism through Holocaust Education,” in *Combating Intolerance, Exclusion and Violence through Holocaust Education: Proceedings of the Conference on May 27–29, 2009* (Paris: UNESCO, 2009), 33–46, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000186689>.

**17** Cf. *ibid.*, 36–37.

**18** Cf. *ibid.*, 38.

**19** Cf. P. Carrier, E. Fuchs, and T. Messinger, *The International Status of Education about the Holocaust: A Global Mapping of Textbooks and Curricula* (Paris: UNESCO, 2014), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000228776>.

**20** For instance, Egypt portrays the Holocaust as Zionist propaganda; Iraq explains Jewish immigration to mandatory Palestine as result of British policy due to Jewish terror groups and makes no reference to Jews as victims of the Holocaust, portrayed as violation of international law due to war context; Poland portrays the Holocaust as a consequence of the German occupation of Poland, minimizing concentration camps as the central element of the Holocaust; Syrian textbooks talk in general terms about the Holocaust and refer to Zionism as a Western colonial enterprise, resulting in British encouragement of Jewish settlement; Yemen does not even mention the Holocaust and defines Zionism as a consequence of World War II.

such as the 2016 Roundtable “How to Respond to Antisemitism through Education, Culture and Communication?”<sup>21</sup> organized in cooperation with IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance), convened experts and officials in order to address contemporary manifestations of antisemitism.<sup>22</sup> Other projects, carried out in cooperation with the OSCE devoted to education, include references to antisemitism in connection with the Holocaust and contemporary manifestations of antisemitism, such as “The Teacher’s Guide on the Prevention of Violent Antisemitism” of 2016, which contains a reference to antisemitism as the driving force that led to the Holocaust,<sup>23</sup> and the “Addressing Anti-Semitism through Education: Guidelines for Policymakers” of 2018,<sup>24</sup> which comprises contemporary examples such as the “situation in the Middle East as a justification for antisemitic acts.”<sup>25</sup>

Finally, in 2017, UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova addressing the 15<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly of the World Jewish Congress declared that there is “there is also – this must be very clear – a new anti-Semitism today expressed in the form of a demonization of Israel, through the hateful and systematic criticism of a country, and seeking to de-legitimize its very existence,”<sup>26</sup> but this admission seems to be formulated for the specific audience to which it was addressed and does not reflect the agency’s work, which has adopted a series of controver-

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**21** “Round-Table: How to Respond to Antisemitism through Education, Culture and Communication?” December 6, 2016; for the announcement of the event, see <https://en.unesco.org/events/round-table-how-respond-antisemitism-through-education-culture-and-communication>.

**22** Another event, in which fifty experts convened “joint development of a guide for educational policy-makers,” was organized in 2017 with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights; for the announcement of the event, see [http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/experts\\_meet\\_on\\_how\\_best\\_to\\_address\\_anti\\_semitism\\_through\\_ed/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/experts_meet_on_how_best_to_address_anti_semitism_through_ed/).

**23** See, UNESCO, *Teacher’s Guide on the Prevention of Violent Antisemitism* (Paris: UNESCO, 2016), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000244676>; section 3.4 “Topic to address violent extremism” mentions antisemitism and the Holocaust as an historical example, cf. *ibid.*, 31.

**24** UNESCO and OSCE, *Addressing Anti-Semitism through Education: Guidelines for Policymakers* (Paris and Warsaw: UNESCO and OSCE, 2018), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000263702>.

**25** *Ibid.*, 24.

**26** I. Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, “On the Role of UNESCO in Countering Anti-Semitism and Preserving the Legacy of the Holocaust—on the occasion of the launch of UNESCO’s guide on Holocaust Education and Genocide Prevention,” address to the 15<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly of the World Jewish Congress, New York, April 24, 2017, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248102>.

sial resolutions blamed for denying the Jewish link to Jerusalem and therefore mining Jewish claims of statehood in the Land of Israel.<sup>27</sup>

## The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

The OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights) is perhaps the main UN institution that could effectively combat antisemitism because of its mandate and its multiple instruments. The institution's work on antisemitism, however, tends to be limited to combating Holocaust denial. Indeed, antisemitism does not appear as a specific thematic issue on the OHCHR's agenda; occasionally, it appears in the work of the Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Religion and Belief, Minority Issues, and on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

The Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief dedicated a consistent part of its 2003 report to the analysis of Islamophobia and increasing anti-Muslim sentiments,<sup>28</sup> while referring to the parallel Jew-hatred only by quoting the EU human rights body,<sup>29</sup> which points to increasing hostility against Muslims and also to "acts of vandalism in synagogues and verbal and physical attacks on Jews, in parallel with the renewed crisis in the Middle East."<sup>30</sup>

Between 2004 and 2008, the annual reports mention antisemitic episodes in the world, twice in Belarus,<sup>31</sup> involving cemetery vandalism, and once in

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**27** That same year, UNESCO World Heritage Committee adopted a resolution, which confirms two previous resolutions in 2015 and 2016 referring to Jewish sites in Jerusalem and Hebron by their Arabic names. The adoption of these documents sparked a heated debate on international de-legitimization of Israel's claims to Jerusalem and the historical ties of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel.

**28** Cf. "Civil and Political Rights, Including Religious Intolerance," Report submitted by Mr. Abdelfattah Amor, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 2002/40, E/CN.4/2003/66 of January 15, 2003, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/488167/files/E\\_CN-4\\_2003\\_66-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/488167/files/E_CN-4_2003_66-EN.pdf).

**29** The EU human rights body was then called the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), which later became the FRA Fundamental Rights Agency.

**30** E/CN.4/2003/66, par. 101.

**31** Cf. "Report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on freedom of religion or belief, Asma Jahangir," to the General Assembly A/59/366 of September 16, 2004, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/533589/files/A\\_59\\_366-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/533589/files/A_59_366-EN.pdf); and "Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Asma Jahangir—Addendum Summary of cases transmitted to Governments and replies received," to the then Commission on Human Rights,

Yemen,<sup>32</sup> involving threats to the local Jewish community. Interestingly, in an antisemitic episode taking place in Pakistan and involving the use of word “Jew” to slander opponents,<sup>33</sup> the Special Rapporteur did not consider it as a form of antisemitism, raising concerns about freedom of expression in the country. In 2007, the annual report mentions the country visit to UK states that “World politics also have repercussions at the domestic level, for example the impact of developments in the Middle East on the situation of the Jewish community,”<sup>34</sup> avoiding the word antisemitism. However, the Rapporteur failed to mention that the antisemitic episodes occurred in the context of the anti-Israeli demonstrations in Europe, such as in the summer of 2014, during the military operation “Protective Edge.”<sup>35</sup> In 2019, the Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed dedicated the annual report to antisemitism, warning about the growing antisemitism, including violent incidents, and the widespread perception of insecurity among Jews. Remarkably, the report notes that “hostility, discrimination and violence motivated by antisemitism has received scant attention as a human rights issue,”<sup>36</sup> ac-

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E/CN.4/2005/61/Add.1 of March 15, 2005, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/543795/files/E\\_CN\\_4\\_2005\\_61\\_Add.1-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/543795/files/E_CN_4_2005_61_Add.1-EN.pdf).

**32** Cf. “Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Asma Jahangir Addendum Summary of cases transmitted to Governments and replies received,” to the Human Rights Council, A/HRC/7/10/Add.1 of February 28, 2008, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/622413/files/A\\_HRC\\_7\\_10\\_Add-1-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/622413/files/A_HRC_7_10_Add-1-EN.pdf).

**33** Cf. the report submitted to the then Commission on Human Rights, E/CN.4/2006/5/Add.1 of March 27, 2006, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/572357/files/E\\_CN-4\\_2006\\_5\\_Add-1-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/572357/files/E_CN-4_2006_5_Add-1-EN.pdf).

**34** “Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief,” to the General Assembly, A/62/280 of August 20, 2007, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/607111/files/A\\_62\\_280-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/607111/files/A_62_280-EN.pdf), par. 26, 9.

**35** The Israeli military Operation Protective Edge was launched to destroy the tunnels built by the Hamas terrorist organization into Israeli territory in order to carry out attacks against the civilian population and as a response to the incessant firing of missiles from the Gaza Strip. As happens around important controversies regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict, civil society organizations in both Europe and the US have organized activities advocating in favor and against Israel. Among these are also mass demonstrations across Europe, in which different manifestations of antisemitism took place, including signs and language recalling Nazi antisemitic expression and attacks to Jewish sites. For a collection of images, please see the collection of pictures from the manifestation and of cartoons published by the Kantor Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry, accessed February 25, 2019, <http://www.kantorcenter.tau.ac.il/sites/default/files/Demos%20Gaza%20July-November%202014.pdf>. Regarding attacks on Jews and Jewish properties, see R. Wistrich, “Summer in Paris,” *Mosaic Magazine*, October 5, 2014, <https://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2014/10/summer-in-paris/>.

**36** Cf. the report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Ahmed Shaheed submitted to the General Assembly, 74th session, September 23, 2019, A/74/358, [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/A\\_74\\_47921ADV.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/A_74_47921ADV.pdf), par. 4.

knowledging Jew-hatred inspired by extreme right and radical Islamist ideologies,<sup>37</sup> also expressing concern for the increase of left-wing antisemitism.<sup>38</sup> This report is unprecedented for three reasons: first, it is the first comprehensive work of a UN agency on antisemitism; secondly, it addresses the multifaceted aspects of contemporary antisemitism, including Israel-related antisemitism; finally, it formulates policy advice for all actors involved in the combat against antisemitism. In this respect, the Special Rapporteur supports the use of the 2016 IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism; urges the adoption of a human rights-based approach for dealing with the phenomenon of Jew-hatred; and, as far as the UN is concerned, suggests the appointment of a focal point for the dialogue with Jewish communities as well as the monitoring of antisemitism.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the Special Rapporteur recommends that other human rights bodies address antisemitism in their work. This report may be considered groundbreaking because it emphasizes the relevance of human rights bodies in the fight against antisemitism. Ahmed Shaheed has recently condemned the spike in online hate speech connected to the Coronavirus pandemic. The Coronavirus crisis has proved to be a fertile ground for the return of classical Jew-hatred, mainly expressed through online hate speech, such as the antisemitic accusations of Jews or Israelis as plague-spreaders, the portrayal of Jews as a virus, and conspiracy theories accusing Jews of creating or capitalizing on the pandemic. The Special Rapporteur has urged states to take measures against the spread of hate speech, including the antisemitic expressions of conspiracy theories “claiming that Jews or Israel are responsible for developing and spreading COVID-19 virus to reduce the non-Jewish population and to control the world.”<sup>40</sup>

The Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues does not deal with antisemitism, and Jewish minorities are apparently not included in the monitoring of the Expert, although its mandate includes *inter alia* the promotion of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities and of best practices by States. The only time in which antisemitism is

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pars. 16–18.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, par. 63.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pars. 89–90.

<sup>40</sup> “Rise in Antisemitic Hatred during COVID-19 Must be Countered with Tougher Measures, Says UN Expert,” UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, issued April 17, 2020, accessed May 11, 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25800&LangID=E>.

mentioned is in the 2015 report to the Human Rights Council,<sup>41</sup> which refers to neo-Nazi antisemitic speech in online media.

The Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance reports to the General Assembly majorly focus on far-right antisemitism, while forms of contemporary antisemitism are quoted from “external submissions.”

Between 2006 and 2008,<sup>42</sup> antisemitism was analyzed as a result of “the developments in the Middle East” but always connected to Christianophobia and Islamophobia, with an emphasis on the latter. As a consequence, this approach failed to identify the multi-faceted ways in which Jew-hatred began manifesting itself as fueled by anti-Israeli sentiment.

Between 2010 and 2012, the reports describe measures to combat antisemitism taken by certain states;<sup>43</sup> encourage Hungary to adopt policies against antisemitism;<sup>44</sup> and mention one case of antisemitism in Latvia.<sup>45</sup>

Besides mentioning countries’ measures against antisemitism, the 2013 report refers to the IAJLJ (International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists) submission on Greek Golden Dawn antisemitic speech.<sup>46</sup> Tellingly, the 2014 report mentions an episode of antisemitism that occurred during a football

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**41** Cf. “Report of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Rita Izsák,” A/HRC/28/64 of January 5, 2015, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G15/000/32/PDF/G1500032.pdf?OpenElement>.

**42** Cf. “Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance,” A/61/335, of September 17, 2006, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/519/04/PDF/N0651904.pdf?OpenElement>; and “Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance,” A/62/306 of August 24, 2007, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N07/490/48/PDF/N0749048.pdf?OpenElement>.

**43** Cf. “Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 64/147,” A/65/323 of August 24, 2010, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N10/493/25/PDF/N1049325.pdf?OpenElement>.

**44** Cf. “Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance,” A/66/313 of August 19, 2011, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/458/18/PDF/N1145818.pdf?OpenElement>.

**45** Cf. “Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 66/143,” A/67/328 of August 22, 2012, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N12/470/32/PDF/N1247032.pdf?OpenElement>.

**46** Cf. “Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance,” A/68/329 of August 16, 2013, [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Racism/A-68-329\\_en.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Racism/A-68-329_en.pdf).

match between Britain and France but did not mention antisemitic episodes that occurred during the anti-Israeli protests against the military operation “Protective Edge.”<sup>47</sup>

Somehow different is the 2017 report,<sup>48</sup> which, after reiterating the narrative of antisemitism linked to extremist right-wing,<sup>49</sup> and supremacist groups,<sup>50</sup> and to Holocaust Denial,<sup>51</sup> brings two major novelties: first, it includes national initiatives to combat antisemitism, quoting also the Swiss “Coordination intercommunautaire contre l’antisémitisme et la diffamation,” which denounces jihadism as a major antisemitic threat and calls upon human rights organizations to monitor and contrast neo-Nazism, antisemitism, and Holocaust denial.<sup>52</sup>

The Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance reports to the Human Rights Council contain other insights on the monitoring of antisemitism. After an initial mention of new antisemitism in the early 2000s, the Rapporteur has consistently focused on Holocaust denial and far-right speech only.

Between 2006 and 2008, the Rapporteurs three times mentioned new forms of antisemitism stemming from migrant communities in connection with the Arab-Israeli conflict,<sup>53</sup> as well as resulting from perceptions of Israel and Zionism. The 2009 report also condemns Islamophobia, antisemitism, and anti-Arabism,<sup>54</sup> but it does not call upon states to cope with this form of antisemitism. It is

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. “Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance,” A/69/340 of August 22, 2014, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Racism/A-69-340.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. “Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance,” A/72/291 of August 4, 2017, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N17/245/50/PDF/N1724550.pdf?OpenElement>.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, point 78.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, point 80.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, point 91.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, point 93.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. “Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Asma Jahangir, and the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Doudou Diène, further to Human Rights Council decision 1/107 on incitement to racial and religious hatred and the promotion of tolerance,” A/HRC/2/3 of September 20, 2006, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G06/139/90/PDF/G0613990.pdf?OpenElement>.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. “Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Githu Muigai, on the manifestations of defamation of religions, and in particular on the serious implications of Islamophobia, on the enjoyment of all rights by their followers,” to the Human Rights Council, A/HRC/12/38 of July 1, 2009, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G09/144/30/PDF/G0914430.pdf?OpenElement>

worth mentioning that the 2014 report,<sup>55</sup> which focuses on racism online, also associates anti-Muslim sentiment with antisemitism, stating that “the contemporary rise of anti-Muslim sentiment in various regions around the world highlights the vulnerability of religious minorities in communities where they are socially or politically constructed as outsiders. In that regard, one could also underscore the historical and lingering anti-Semitism in some parts of Europe.”<sup>56</sup> The report, however, does not mention why there is a connection and what it consists of. This document, however, expands its scope beyond the other reports and comprises also EU and OSCE policies on antisemitism as well as civil society organizations devoted to combating the phenomenon.

Besides condemning Holocaust Denial in 2015,<sup>57</sup> the Special Rapporteur in 2017 pointed to “the proliferation of anti-Muslim rhetoric and the rise of right-wing extremist parties” in the aftermath of terrorist attacks, which leads to increasing anti-Muslim racisms, and “at the same time, incidents of anti-Semitic hatred have also increased”<sup>58</sup> but fails to mention their nature and the relationship between the two phenomena. Likewise, the 2018 Report, which specifically addresses the political climate in the context of renewed nationalist discourse and migration policies, states that

the resurgent xenophobic and racist rhetoric and policies rooted in ethno-nationalism do not only harm non-citizens of any given nation. They also make formal citizens who are ethnic, racial or religious minorities vulnerable to discrimination and intolerance. For example, Islamophobic or anti-Semitic ethno-nationalism undermines the rights of Muslims or Jews irrespective of citizenship status.<sup>59</sup>

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ment. The Report focuses on the Durban Conference reviews and recalls the Durban Programme of Action.

**55** Cf. “Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance,” A/HRC/32/50 of May 13, 2016, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/097/20/PDF/G1609720.pdf?OpenElement>.

**56** *Ibid.*, par. 33.

**57** Cf. “Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 69/160,” A/HRC/29/47 of April 13, 2015, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Racism/A-HRC-29-47.pdf>.

**58** “Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance,” A/HRC/35/41 of May 9, 2017, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G17/113/80/PDF/G1711380.pdf?OpenElement>, par. 49.

**59** “Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance,” A/HRC/38/52 of April 25, 2018, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/117/79/PDF/G1811779.pdf?OpenElement>, par. 44.

From this analysis, it appears that UN agencies have three tendencies in relation to antisemitism. First, the focus on Holocaust denial and Nazi glorification seldom mentions the connection with antisemitism (or even the word “Jew”) with the result that its inherent character of Jew-hatred is obliterated. Secondly, this kind of antisemitism is mostly associated with forms of hate speech typical of the Western extreme right’s rhetoric, and consequently overlooking how the same phenomenon takes place in other parts of the world and in different cultural contexts. Thirdly, contemporary forms of antisemitism correlated to anti-Israel sentiment are recognized, yet conflated with islamophobia and christophobia: this trio of separate forms of hostility, however connected they may be, is not further explored and, consequently, they are ambiguously diluted without any clear stance against antisemitism.

The failure to define and tackle contemporary antisemitism is even more palpable if one thinks that episodes of antisemitism in connection with the Middle East, such as the 2014 anti-Jewish incidents, are not mentioned and that certain aspects of antisemitism are relegated to quotations of external submissions.

## **Combating Antisemitism, What Else Could Be Done?**

This last section aims to suggest some possible ways to redress the UN approach to antisemitism.

A general look at how antisemitism is framed can shed some light on the effectiveness of its counter policies. While it is still unanimously considered a form of racism, antisemitism has progressively been expunged from the human rights world: no major human rights NGOs analyze antisemitic phenomena or deal with Jew-hatred. UN agencies deal with the phenomenon incidentally. While a major part of the problem is the anti-Israel sentiment, human rights actors that are engaged in the Arab-Israeli conflict refrain from addressing the problems caused by antisemitism. Consequently, antisemitism is mostly dealt with by Jewish organizations and often demoted to be part of what is considered pro-Israel lobbying or a means to silence anti-Israel criticism.

The failure to include antisemitism in larger human rights policies results in the marginalization of the phenomenon and the necessity to create other venues for opposing it—in this respect the IHRA, Jewish organizations, and pro-Israel forums serve as platforms to expose contemporary manifestations of antisemitism and elaborate strategies to contrast it. Yet, the appropriate place to do so should be the UN and the several agencies devoted to the promotion and protection of

human rights, as the 2019 Report of the Special Rapporteur of Freedom of Religion or Belief also emphasized.

In order to reach this goal, there are at least three major steps to take to reinforce and modernize policies against antisemitism.

First, the existing efforts to combat Nazi glorification and Holocaust denial should set straightforward that antisemitism played a paramount role in hate speech, rhetoric, and policies that led to the Holocaust. This point is essential to combat contemporary uses of Nazi speech against Jews and other groups alike—refraining from addressing antisemitism in any reference to Holocaust denial or Nazi rhetoric should be considered in itself a form of denial of the phenomenon itself.

Secondly, the UN should acknowledge that Holocaust denial and Nazi rhetoric are not a problem of the West only. While cooperation with the OSCE ODIHR projects can just strengthen the efficacy of these policies, the OSCE has a specific territorial scope that extends to larger parts of Europe but excludes other continents. Far from being a problem of the European or American extreme right groups solely, antisemitism should be addressed also by African, Middle-East, and Asian states. In this sense, the UN seems unwilling to bring up the issue with other States, where Holocaust denial is widespread or even promoted by governmental policies. Since these states are often in conflict with Israel, an overlapping issue emerges, which is the manifestation of antisemitism in relation to Israel.

Finally, as shown above, UN agencies acknowledge the existence of antisemitism in connection with the developments in the Middle East, which also lead to increasing Islamophobia and Christianophobia. Nonetheless, there is no clarity about what this connection is and how it manifests. By avoiding the exploration of this connection, there is no need to clarify and take a stance on controversial and politicized issues such as the increasingly overlapping semantic meaning of “Jew” and “Zionist” in anti-Israel narrative, or the use of antisemitic rhetoric to portray Zionism and Israel. In this respect, the IHRA definition of antisemitism can give an important contribution to the discussion on what contemporary antisemitism is.

The cause of antisemitism is not a Jewish cause only, but it is a cause for human rights that lies at the heart of the international system of values that has developed after the Second World War. Expunging antisemitism from this system and relegating it to what has become a solely Jewish cause is a betrayal of those principles that the international community determined to be the foundation of the post-Auschwitz world. Therefore, antisemitism needs to be brought back to the center of the human rights discourse in its entirety. However, the controversies around Israel and its real or perceived misbehaviors, obsessively inves-

tigated by the human rights community, as well as the heated discussion of what contemporary antisemitism is and how it is to be discerned from anti-Zionism or anti-Israel criticism, stand in the way. The recent work of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief goes in this direction, but a structural change is needed in the approach is needed.

There are laws, conventions, and definitions. There are monitoring and protection mechanisms of human rights. What we need is a renewed commitment to combat antisemitism, especially in a time of increasing anti-Jewish hatred and growing interdependence of antisemitism, anti-Zionism, and anti-Israeli sentiment.

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