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WORLD JEWISH CONGRESS

Call for submissions to the thematic report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression in Challenging Times

Submitted by the World Jewish Congress

The World Jewish Congress (WJC), representing Jewish communities and organizations in more than 100 countries around the world, advocates on their behalf towards governments, parliaments, international organizations, and other faiths. The WJC represents the plurality of the Jewish people and is politically non-partisan. As the "Diplomatic Arm of the Jewish People," the WJC has been active in countless campaigns since its inception: advocating for justice for Holocaust victims and their heirs and protecting the memory of the Holocaust; obtaining restitution of, or compensation for, stolen Jewish property; countering antisemitism and delegitimization of the State of Israel, as well as the denial of Jewish right to self-determination; and engaging in dialogue with other faith-based organizations, but most of all, the protection and fostering of Jewish minority communities around the world. The WJC has had a Special Consultative status to ECOSOC since 1947, among the first NGOs to do so.

Over the last years, Jewish communities around the world have witnessed a gravely concerning rise in antisemitic attitudes, exacerbated by global developments such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Hamas terrorist attack against Israel on October 7 2023. The United Nations, founded on the ashes of World War II and the Holocaust, should prioritize without delay the fight against antisemitic discourse and Holocaust denial and distortion, which undermine its basic principles and founding goals as stipulated in the UN Charter, and to forward and promote the freedom of expression for all.

General Overview

Starting with the October 7 terrorist attacks by Hamas against Israel, the global Jewish community has witnessed an explosion of antisemitic hatred around the world with horrifying effects on Jews and others: people have been murdered; synagogues have been burned; Jewish students are bullied and assaulted in schools and on campuses around the world; Antisemitic chants and graffiti have appeared in cities around the world; Following the events of October 7, antisemitism online has escalated to unprecedented levels. What is even more alarming is the way this digital hate spills over into real-world violence. Around the globe, antisemitic incidents have reached record highs, threatening the safety of Jewish individuals and communities. This troubling trend endangers their physical well-being, disrupts their way of life, and undermines their freedom to practice their religion.

The World Jewish Congress stresses the urgency of the situation, asserting that now is the time for everyone to speak up. In light of this dramatic rise of antisemitism and hatred around the world, we urge the United Nations, states, the media, social media platforms and technology companies, universities and academic institutions, religious or belief leaders, and the civil society at large to speak up, condemn the hatred, and express the solidarity with the Jewish community.

In response to the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression's call for inputs, we would like to offer the following contribution:

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Trends, challenges and problems: What role have policies and practices of social media platforms played in the trends, threats and challenges to freedom of expression in relation to the OPT and the Gaza conflict?

The World Jewish Congress has recently released two reports, highlighting how the social media platforms enable the spread of hate speech and misinformation, phenomena which marginalize and ostracize Jews through narratives filled with conspiracy myths and prejudice. In the aftermath of October 7, the English-language version of Wikipedia contains an anti-Israel bias that perpetuates disinformation and promotes negative stereotypes, according to a World Jewish Congress report issued on the sidelines of the UN Human Rights Council 55th Session. The bias takes myriad forms, appearing in terminology, framing and lack of context, one-sided sources and critical omissions, among other occurrences, in articles on the ongoing Israel-Hamas war, according to the WJC report.[1]

Another World Jewish Congress report, entitled "A Flood of Hate," details the fact that the prevalence of Hamas' propaganda materials online helped fuel an adversarial information ecosystem rife with disinformation and hate speech that dehumanizes Israel and global Jewry at-large. Hamas' Telegram network had an outsized impact on the larger social media discussions in the immediate wake of the terror attacks, despite having limited access to mainstream social media platforms. In addition to Hamas, nation state actors like Iran are propagating conspiracy myths about the conflict on fringe social media platforms frequented by both far right and pro-Hamas communities around the world, contributing to radicalization and calls for violence across the entire political landscape. The convergence of far-right and racist ideologies with support for Hamas becomes evident on fringe platforms and presents a notably concerning ideological shift that has occurred in far-right extremist circles in the wake of the October 7 terror attacks in Israel.[2]

Has there been a rise in threats, violence or incitement of violence, hostility and discrimination against specific racial, religious or ethnic groups, in particular Jewish, Muslim or Arab groups and individuals since the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza, including possible statements demonstrating genocidal intent? Please provide concrete examples and statistical and other data, if available, and where appropriate, highlight gender dimensions.

[1] https://wjc-org-website.s3.amazonaws.com/horizon/assets/4eQd1wRR/the_bias_against_israel_in_english_wikipedia_240314_5-1.pdf

[2] https://wjc-org-website.s3.amazonaws.com/horizon/assets/I7LhLQGU/a-flood-of-hate-report.pdf

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The Jewish community in Luxembourg experienced an “explosion” in antisemitic comments and incidents following Hamas’ attack on Israel on October 7 and the ensuing war in Gaza, the Research and Information Centre on Antisemitism in Luxembourg (Rial) said in its annual report for 2023. In the first nine months of last year, the group recorded 36 cases of antisemitism, an average of four a month. That number rose to 108 incidents in the quarter of the year after Hamas attack on Israel on October 7 and the subsequent war on Hamas[3] .

In Sweden, more than 100 antisemitic hate crimes were reported between October 7 and the end of 2023, almost five times the number registered over the same period a year earlier, a report showed. A total of 110 complaints were registered by police between October 7 — when Hamas launched an attack on southern Israel — and December 31, according to the report by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (BRA).[4]

The Community Security Trust of United Kingdom, CST reported 4,103 instances of anti-Jewish hate recorded across the UK in 2023. This is the highest annual total ever reported to CST. It is a 147% rise from the 1,662 antisemitic incidents in 2022, and 81% higher than the previous yearly record of 2,261 incidents, reported in 2021. CST recorded 1,684 antisemitic incidents in 2020, and 1,813 in 2019. The record total of anti-Jewish hate incidents in 2023 is a result of the unparallelled volume of antisemitism perpetrated following the Hamas terror attack on Israel on October 7. Of the 4,103 instances of anti-Jewish hate reported, 2,699 (66%) occurred on or after October 7. This figure alone exceeds any previous annual antisemitic incident total recorded by CST and marks an increase of 589% from the 392 instances of antisemitism reported to CST over the same time period in 2022.[5]

In Spain, hundreds of pro-Palestine rioters attacked a synagogue in the Spanish enclave of Melilla in North Africa while worshippers were inside Wednesday evening, according to Spanish media reports. The rioters shouted “murderous Israel” in front of the Or Zaruah Synagogue and waved Palestinian flags until police dispersed them, a report in the newspaper El Independente said.[6]

[3] https://www.luxtimes.lu/luxembourg/war-in-gaza-has-triggered-rise-in-antisemitism-report-states/13513704.html
[4] https://www.timesofisrael.com/sweden-reports-sharp-rise-in-antisemitic-hate-crimes-since-hamas-attack-on-israel/
[5] https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2024/02/15/antisemitic-incidents-report-2023
[6] https://www.algemeiner.com/2023/10/18/mob-attacks-synagogue-in-spain-reports/

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In Germany, antisemitic incidents have risen by 320%. Between the Hamas attack and the end of January 2024, 2249 antisemitic crimes have been committed, most of them related to the conflict in the Middle East.[7]

In the Netherlands, reports of antisemitic incidents have spiked over 800% since October 7. The surge only reflects antisemitic acts reported to the Center for Information and Documentation on Israel (CIDI), not all incidents filed to police departments and other anti-discrimination bureaus. CIDI would not release specific incident numbers but said the barrage of reports it has received since the start of the Israel-Hamas war is 818% higher than its monthly average recorded over the past three years. The group tallied 183 total incidents for all of 2021.[8]

In France, antisemitic incidents have increased by 284% between 2022 and 2023, according to data from the French interior ministry. In 2023, antisemitic acts constituted 60% of all anti-religious acts, compared to 26% in 2022. Reports of the alleged rape of a 12-year-old Jewish girl in a suburb of Paris, with the attackers hurling antisemitic insults at her during the incident, have surfaced in June 2023[9].

In Australia, within hours of the October 7 attack, groups and individuals began to mobilize politically and capitalize on the targeting of Jews. On 8 October, a rally was held by extremist Muslims in Lakemba, Sydney, where a speaker and attendees expressed their exultation at the killing of Jews by Hamas. On 9 October, at a rally held by an anti-Israel crowd at the Sydney Opera House protesters chanted “Fuck the Jews” and “Gas the Jews” and burnt an Israeli flag. As the days and weeks went on, there was a surge in the number of anti-Jewish incidents across Australia. Of great concern, were the death threats sent to Jewish organizations and the calls for killing Jews at anti-Israel street protests. The Executive Council of Australian Jewry reports 316 antisemitic incidents in October 2023, only 5 of which were reported between October 1 and 7. A further 346 incidents were reported in November 2023, making a total of 662 antisemitic incidents reported during October and November 2023. By comparison, there were 495 anti-Jewish incidents reported in Australia for the entire 12 months to 30 September 2023. When comparing the number of reported antisemitic

[7] https://www.jewishnews.co.uk/opinion-rising-antisemitism-weakens-our-societies/
[8] https://forward.com/fast-forward/568955/antisemitic-incidents-up-800-netherlands-since-oct-7-dutch-watchdog-reports/
[9] https://apnews.com/article/france-antisemitism-election-campaign-d7abcccdc89650190723e55a1716228d

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incidents in October and November 2023 to the number for the months of October and November in 2022, the percentage increase is 738%.[10]

Recommendations and good practices: What recommendations do you think the Special Rapporteur should make to governments, companies, the media and civil society to uphold the right to freedom of expression and prohibit hate speech? Please provide examples of good practices by governments, companies, the media sector, civil society and other stakeholders.

Many international organizations and global actors around the world have pledged to fight antisemitism in all and every form, as outlined in a report[11] presented by the World Jewish Congress to the OSCE in 2023. This report presents a compilation of international commitments to the global fight against antisemitism adopted by the U.N., the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and the European Union.

The compilation of commitments was grouped into 12 categories, including condemning all manifestations of antisemitism, appointing an envoy, adopting a national strategy to combat antisemitism, promoting interfaith dialogue, collecting data, and regulating online hatred. It is critical for lawmakers, Jewish communities, academics, and the media to hold governments accountable if they fail to carry out these commitments.

The World Jewish Congress maintains that, if the pledging organizations, as well as Member States, follow and adopt these guidelines, and ensure their efficient implementation, the horrific developments as presented throughout this submission, will be effectively reduced and the Jewish communities' right to life, safety, and freedom of expression protected.

[10] https://www.ecaj.org.au/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/ECAJ-preliminary-report-antisemitic-incidents-since-Oct-7-attack-1.pdf
[11] https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/fight-against-antisemitism