



Antisemitism is toxic to democracy and must be addressed, says expert

01.11.2019 | United Nations

GENEVA (17 October 2019) – Antisemitism is toxic to democracy and poses a threat to all societies if left unaddressed, warned the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed.

"There is not a more graphic example than the Holocaust of how religious and racial hatred can lead to genocide and the destruction of societies," he said in a report to the UN General Assembly on Thursday.

"I am alarmed by the growing use of antisemitic tropes by white supremacists, including neo-Nazis and members of radical Islamist groups, in slogans, images, stereotypes and conspiracy theories to incite and justify hostility, discrimination and violence against Jews. I am also concerned about the increasing expressions of antisemitism emanating from sources in the political left and about discriminatory State practices towards Jews."

Shaheed expressed serious concerns about the increased frequency of antisemitic incidents, and the prevalence of antisemitic hate speech online.

"Violence, discrimination and expressions of hostility motivated by antisemitism is a serious obstacle to the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief," the Special Rapporteur added. "Attacks on synagogues, desecration of cemeteries, or restrictions on the wearing of religious symbols and the practice of religious rites constitute violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief of Jews."

"Antisemitism presents serious challenges to the elimination of all forms of intolerance, hatred and discrimination based on religion or belief. Such hatred poses risks to Jews and to members of minorities everywhere."

"As monitoring mechanisms for hate crimes are non-existent in many States, there is serious need for investments in education and training at all levels in identifying various manifestations of antisemitism and of other hatred."

Shaheed urged States, civil society, media and the UN to take action in addressing antisemitism within a wider human rights framework. "Citizens of all societies must be empowered with critical thinking, empathy and human rights literacy to be resilient to extremist ideologies, including antisemitic propaganda," he said.

"States have a duty to take all appropriate measures and to prohibit by law incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence based on religion or belief, including against Jews."

The expert recommended the use of the Working Definition adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance as a non-legal educational tool while cautioning that the use of the definition by public bodies for any regulatory purpose would require due diligence to ensure that freedom of expression is protected for all in conformity with international human rights standards.

"Civil society actors can also play a vital role in combatting antisemitism by establishing inter-faith networks aimed at advancing social cohesion," the expert said. "Let us collectively reject antisemitism and other forms of hatred and create an inclusive societies that uphold human rights and security for all."

Mr. Ahmed Shaheed (the Maldives) was appointed as Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief by the UN Human Rights Council in 2016. Mr. Shaheed is Deputy Director of the Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex, UK and Senior Fellow of the Raoul Wallenberg Human Rights Centre in Canada. He was Foreign Minister of the Maldives from 2005 to 2007 and from 2008 to 2010. He led the country's efforts to sign and ratify all nine international human rights Conventions and to implement them in law and practice. Mr. Shaheed is the former Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran.

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