

# ISRAEL

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Statement by:

**Ms. Meirav Eilon Shahar**

**Counsellor**

**Permanent Mission of Israel**

Agenda Item 65  
Elimination of Racism and Racial Discrimination

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Mr. Chairman,

Israel knows from bitter experience the deep trauma inflicted by racism. It has been the reality of the Jewish people for centuries. Acknowledging this history and the collective and individual responsibility it entails, Israel reiterates its unwavering commitment to oppose racism and discrimination in all their forms and manifestations.

Mr. Chairman,

Earlier this year in Paris, a 23-year-old Jewish man named Ilan Halimi was abducted, then brutally tortured and murdered by a notorious and racially motivated sectarian gang. And just several months ago, a man walked into a Seattle, Washington Jewish center where he shot six people, killing one woman. Sadly, these types of crimes are becoming all too common and ever-more violent. Last year saw a significant rise in the number of anti-Semitic incidents world-wide; of the many thousands reported, hundreds were violent. And these are, no doubt, only a small fraction of the actual hate crimes committed. A recent British Parliamentary report on anti-Semitism in the United Kingdom documents this clear trend, and points to the urgent need for greater study and data collection.

The latest ugly wave of anti-Semitism has swept both Europe and the Middle East. Iran, in particular, has been a source of the most vile anti-Semitic rhetoric heard anywhere. Its president has repeatedly denied the Holocaust, and has openly called for Israel to be wiped off the map while acquiring the capabilities to do so. It should be noted that the United Kingdom's Parliamentary report, the European Union and the Special Rapporteur all recognize that denying the Holocaust or Israel's right to exist are forms of anti-Semitism. These odious statements, aimed at inciting violent attacks against Israel and Jewish people around the globe, are a wake-up call to the international community to stand with a resolute, unwavering voice against this dangerous regime and condemn its racist ideology.

The last few months have seen a spike in the number of anti-Semitic incidents around the world. This has been accompanied by a deliberate conflation of legitimate political discourse with anti-Semitism. Indeed, the British Parliamentary report and the Special Rapporteur document this development. Israel supports the existence of meaningful political dialogue. As a democratic State with a pluralist and open society, such discourse occurs among the Israeli public on a daily basis. However, there is a delicate balance between legitimate freedom of expression, even of unpopular opinions, and incitement.

Israel concurs with the findings of the Special Rapporteur in his report on racist political platforms. The report notes that, in many cases, racist ideology and rhetoric is increasingly finding its way into the political mainstream. There is a growing tendency for cynical politicians around the world to exploit people's fears and insecurities in uncertain times. This practice perpetuates inequality and phobia of "the other." The overall effect is to give legitimacy and normalcy to a discourse of prejudice and hatred that would otherwise wither under the light of rational scrutiny.

Demagogues often use this strategy as a means to attain and maintain power, and to divert attention from the bankruptcy of their own ideologies. However, this only postpones the more difficult work of creating democratic, inclusive and open societies that offer real freedoms and opportunity.

During the Holocaust, most of the world stood by silently while the most horrific genocidal violence was unleashed. Tragically, as we saw in Rwanda in 1994, the international community has not learned its lesson. And more recent events in Darfur again fail to give us hope.

Mr. Chairman,

Israel welcomes the report of the Special Rapporteur and notes with concern its observations that racism of all types is on the rise, and that in many States, the political will to combat it is fading. In some countries it is now acceptable to victimize asylum-seekers and refugees, and to question the idea of multiculturalism. Likewise, the deplorable upsurge in Islamophobia merits a stronger emphasis on intercultural dialogue and a real commitment on the part of political leaders to take the lead in combating all forms of prejudice. Other voices of reason remind us to exercise greater personal responsibility in our private discourse.

Anti-Semitism and racism are global phenomena. The Special Rapporteur's claim that "racism constitutes the greatest threat to democracy in many societies on all continents" cannot be overstated. There are encouraging signs, however, that in recent years the fight against anti-Semitism and racism has gained new momentum as States and the international community acknowledge the urgency of addressing this issue. Israel has taken note of a number of conferences on racism which have recently taken place on several continents, including several organized by the OSCE, as well as other initiatives to combat racism in sports. We support the Special Rapporteur's call for a dual strategy in combating racism: addressing the issue through political means, including appropriate legislation, and a long-term commitment to education through cross-cultural and inter-religious dialogue. Religious communities from all traditions also have a role to play. They are increasingly active in these dialogues, and can be effective in moderating radical elements.

Israel is encouraged that the General Assembly one year ago adopted the resolution on Holocaust remembrance. In order to promote education and dialogue, the resolution requested the Secretary-General to establish a programme of outreach on the Holocaust and the United Nations. The programme promotes learning about this dark period in our world's history, still within living memory, with the hope that future acts of genocide may be prevented. The wide-spread escalation of racism and anti-Semitism in particular should serve as a call to action to fully implement this resolution.

Racism, xenophobia and prejudice of any kind can scar the psyche of its victims for generations. What we all do now to confront this scourge, to implement zero tolerance at the national level, will not only serve to safeguard today's victims, but will help spare future generations from the scars of hatred and intolerance.

Mr. Chairman,

Israel, perhaps more than most nations, is a land of immigrants. They have come from nearly every nation on earth. The diversity of cultures concentrated in our small country is a daily reminder that the line between any one of us and "the other" is fluid, and is often an artifact of history or chance. The Bible reminds us of this, and asks us to consider how we treat "the other" when it states, "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 22:20). Israel pledges itself to this principle at home and abroad. And all of us, individually and collectively, should take a more active role in combating racism and the ignorance that fosters it.

Thank you.