Denmark, Australia: UNHRC must stop biased treatment of Israel

February 25, 2019

By [Tovah Lazaroff](https://www.jpost.com/Author/Tovah-Lazaroff)

The Jerusalem Post

<https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Denmark-Australia-UNHRC-must-stop-biased-treatment-of-Israel-581758>

Denmark and Australia called on the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to stop its biased treatment of Israel by eliminating the controversial Agenda Item 7, when they spoke Monday at the opening of the council’s 40th session in Geneva.

“As a member, Denmark will work for a Council that treats all states in an equal and fair manner. It undermines the credibility of this Council and its members when it insists on singling out one country, Israel, a democracy, under its own agenda item [7],” Danish Foreign Minister Anders Samuelsen said.

He referenced the UNHRC mandate that Israeli alleged human rights abuses must be debated at each session under Agenda Item 7. Human rights allegations against all other UN member states are debated under Agenda Item 4. Only Israel is singled out with its own separate listing on the agenda.

The United States has long worked to eliminate that agenda item without any success. The European Union has increasingly protested Agenda Item 7, with its member states often refraining from speaking during that debate.

On Monday, Samuelsen directly called on all of the 47 UNHRC member states to stay silent during debate, which will take place on March 18, days before the 40th session ends on March 22.

“All countries should be treated on an equal footing. Therefore, we will not speak under Item 7, but address the situation in Israel/Palestine under other country-specific items [Agenda Item 4] where it belongs. We encourage others to do the same,” Samuelsen said.

Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne added, “It is our firm view that a separate agenda item focusing on a single country situation – in this case Israel – is inappropriate. It does not occur in any other context for any other country.”

A number of countries, including Turkey and Qatar, took Israel to task for its treatment of the Palestinians and spoke in support of a two-state solution at the pre-1967 lines with east Jerusalem as its capital.

“Human rights violations by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory have reached an alarming level. Arbitrary arrests, confiscation of Palestinian land, forced displacement of Palestinians and expansion of the illegal settlement activities are clearly in the breach of international law. Even more worrying is the continued use of excessive and disproportionate force by Israel against civilians,” Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said.

United Nations [secretary-general Antonio Guterres warned](https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/UN-Secretary-General-Were-seeing-a-ground-swell-of-antisemitism-581714) against a rising tide of xenophobia, including antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred.

“Hate speech is a menace to democratic values, social stability and peace,” Guterres said as he spoke at the opening of the month-long UN Human Rights Council’s 40th session in Geneva. “We are seeing a ground swell of xenophobia, racism and intolerance, including rising antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred.”

Hate speech has spread “like wild fire through social media, the Internet, and conspiracy theories. It is abetted by a public discourse that stigmatizes women, minorities, migrants and refugees.”

“Hate is moving into the mainstream in liberal democracies and authoritarian states alike,” Guterres continued. “Political parties and leaders are cutting and pasting ideas from the fringes into their own propaganda and their campaigns. Parties once rightly considered pariahs are gaining influence over governments. With each broken norm, the pillars of humanities are weakened.”

“We have seen how the debate on human mobility has been poisoned with false narratives, linking refugees and migrants to terrorism and scapegoating them for many of society’s ills,” Guterres said.

The UN is in the middle of preparing a global plan of actions to combat hate speech.

“For our part, I have asked my Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, to bring together a UN team to scale up our response to hate speech, define a system – wide strategy and present a global plan of action on a fast-track basis,” Guterres said.

Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó shot back at Guterres on the issue of migration, explaining that a person’s ability to flee their country of origin and be taken in by another country is not a human rights issue.

“We still feel that there is an approach in the international community as if migration was a fundamental human right, as if migration was the best thing that could ever happen to humanity,” Szijjártó said, adding that “this is a false, harmful and dangerous approach.”

“We do not accept that by definition a multicultural society would be more valuable than a homogeneous one,” he said.

“Migration is not a fundamental human right. There is no right to wake up in the morning, pick a country where one would like to live in and in order to get there and violate a series of borders.”

He added that the migratory flows constitute a terror risk and “gave a huge chance to terrorist and members of terrorist organizations to come to Europe.” This is particularly true now that foreign fighters who were part of ISIS, now want to return to Europe, he said.

With regard to religious persecution, Szijjártó said that “Christianity is the most persecuted religion globally.”

Turkey and Britain voiced concern on Monday at China’s alleged mistreatment of Uighurs and other Muslims in its Xinjiang region, with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu calling on Beijing to protect freedom of religion and cultural identity.

Diplomats and activists say China has lobbied hard to avoid scrutiny over its policies in Xinjiang and other rights issues at the four-week meeting.

Western countries are looking to Turkey and other members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to spotlight what rights groups call internment camps in Xinjiang, a remote region in western China. Beijing says they are re-education and training facilities that have been highly successful in stopping attacks previously blamed on Islamist militants and separatists.

Britain was the only country joining Turkey in raising the issue at Monday’s session, where Lord Ahmad, minister of state at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, said: “We are deeply concerned about the persecution of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang.”

UN experts and activists say the camps hold a million Uighurs, who speak a Turkic language, and other Muslims. China has denied accusations of mistreatment and deems criticism within the UN council to be interference in its sovereignty.