Amid stark disagreement, UN postpones meeting on antisemitism

June 12, 2023

By Mike Wagenheim

Jewish News Syndicate

<https://www.jns.org/world-news/antisemitism/23/6/12/294295/>

The United Nations was [supposed](https://www.jns.org/united-nations-to-hold-meeting-in-spain-to-examine-internal-antisemitism/) to convene a meeting with Jewish leaders and global antisemitism envoys next week in Cordoba, Spain to unveil its plan to combat antisemitism. It has postponed that meeting, amid stark disagreement over the contents of the draft plan.

That document, which the United Nations circulated two weeks ago, is ‘deeply flawed and generated much criticism,’ Rabbi Andrew Baker, director of international Jewish affairs at the American Jewish Committee, told JNS. ‘It was clear that nothing would be agreed at Cordoba.’

Miguel Moratinos, high representative for the U.N. alliance of civilizations and U.N. focal point to monitor antisemitism and enhance a system-wide response, sent a letter to would-be meeting participants on June 9.

‘After very careful consideration and aiming to ensure the action plan is inclusive and benefits from the inputs of all stakeholders, I would like to allow more time for further work and finalization of the plan during summer 2023,’ he wrote.

The meeting, which was slated for June 20 and 21, is postponed until September, with no exact date set yet.

‘We are still receiving feedback and input on the proposed draft past the deadline that was set last week,’ Nihal Saad, director of the UN Alliance of Civilizations and a Moratinos spokeswoman, said on Monday in response to a JNS inquiry.

‘We are keen to incorporate those inputs and allow more time for consultations, hence the postponement,’ Saad added.

The draft plan, a confidential copy of which was reviewed by JNS, gives equal weight and mention to competing antisemitism definitions—the widely-accepted International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition, as well as the Nexus definition and Jerusalem Declaration.

The Nexus definition states, in part, that ‘paying disproportionate attention to Israel and treating Israel differently than other countries is not prima facie proof of antisemitism,’ while the Jerusalem Declaration states, in part, that ‘singling out Israel as uniquely colonial or apartheid, and saying that Israel has no right to exist, are not, ‘in and of themselves,’ antisemitic.’

The draft plan seen by JNS states that antisemitism includes ‘accusations that Israeli policies or actions are ‘Nazi,’’ and notes that ‘Increasingly, there have been attempts or calls to delegitimize the right of Israel to exist, including calls for its destruction.’

Member states are asked to formulate an acceptable antisemitism definition in the draft plan, without the United Nations taking a position. In recent weeks, anti-Israel groups had written to the international body, asking it not to adopt the IHRA definition.

‘The existence of controversy over the definition should not defeat the purpose and significance of this action plan,’ the draft states, and ‘as with other forms of hatred and intolerance, definitions change over time.’

Terrorism, too, lacks an internationally agreed definition, the draft plan notes.

‘That did not, however, stop governments nor international bodies, including the United Nations, from launching policies and frameworks to prevent and counter terrorism,’ it continues.

**Reinventing the wheel**

David Michaels, director of United Nations and Intercommunal Affairs at B’nai B’rith International, told JNS that the United Nations should adopt the IHRA definition and ‘incorporate the action [plan](https://www.jns.org/uns-point-man-on-religious-freedom-has-released-his-plan-for-combating-anti-semitism/) already authored by the U.N.’s last special rapporteur on religious freedom, Ahmed Shaheed.’

Shaheed had presented a milestone antisemitism report to the U.N. General Assembly in 2020, and an action plan to combat antisemitism in 2022.

‘It is also obviously vital that U.N. leaders speak out when individuals within the U.N. system express sentiment that crosses the line,’ and also that the international body not support those who misrepresent the IHRA definition by claiming that it stifles legitimate debate about Israel, said Michaels.

‘At the same time, no initiative to fight antisemitism would be a serious one if it doesn’t honestly address prevalent contemporary forms, including virulent anti-Israeli and anti-Zionist hatred,’ he added.

The draft plan recommends a zero-tolerance policy for antisemitism, and includes bias training, a global campaign to deconstruct stereotypes of Jews and a number of recommendations to U.N. member states, such as investing in antisemitism and Holocaust education and designating special envoys on the topic. No recommendation is required.

The postponement ‘will allow more time for preparation,’ Michaels told JNS. ‘We all want to ensure that this event—and any work to heighten efforts against antisemitism—is as meaningful and impactful as possible.’

‘It remains so important that Jewish organizations and experts specializing in antisemitism have a central role in informing the direction of U.N. engagement in combating it,’ he added.

**Leaving Israel in the dark**

A schedule for what was to be next week’s meetings in Cordoba, which JNS viewed, listed ‘Consultations on the United Nations draft action plan on monitoring antisemitism and enhancing a system-wide response.’

Moratinos never consulted with nor sought input from Gilad Erdan, the Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, nor from the Israeli Foreign Ministry during the plan’s formulation, which has been three years in the making, an Israeli diplomatic source told JNS, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The Foreign Ministry, but not Erdan, was invited to the Cordoba meeting. The ministry had not responded prior to the postponement, the diplomatic source said.

Erdan and Moratinos appear to have a strained relationship, based on past comments and the lack of communication between their offices.

International Jewish leaders, and former and current Israeli officials, have said for decades that the United Nations suffers from antisemitism and an anti-Israel bias. The international body has not adopted a definition of antisemitism, and it often criticizes Israel and favors Palestinians. Some U.N. employees have glorified Nazis and sympathized with terror groups.

Moratinos disputes this.

‘Israel and the Jewish people are integrated in the essence, in the soul of the U.N. So, how is the U.N. going to be antisemitic?’ he told [JNS](https://www.jns.org/the-united-nations-is-not-antisemitic-its-point-man-on-antisemitism-says/) in February. ‘I have to tell you, the U.N. is not antisemitic.’

Israel’s mission to the United Nations and Jewish groups have faulted Moratinos specifically, and other U.N. officials for failing to condemn antisemitic comments from [Francesca Albanese](https://www.jns.org/lawyer-group-calls-for-un-to-fire-special-rapporteur-francesca-albanese/), the U.N. special rapporteur for the Palestinians, as well as members of the U.N. Human Rights Council’s Commission of Inquiry.

In a recent [interview](https://www.jns.org/world-news/united-nations/23/6/9/293987/) with JNS, Hillel Neuer, executive director of U.N. Watch, referred to the United Nations’ ‘pathological discrimination and delegitimization of Israel.’