

Op-ed: About Anti-Semitism: HRWF's position

– By Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers

– HRWF (26.10.2018) – What is and what is not antisemitism, a widely spread concept about which there is no consensus in the international community? 'Everybody' has his own definition of antisemitism which is partly endorsed by some and challenged by others. A few examples will illustrate the confusion that prevails on this issue.

Definitions

The general definition of antisemitism is hostility or prejudice against Jews but various authorities have developed other definitions.

For the purposes of its 2005 Report on Global Anti-Semitism, the term was considered by the US State Department to mean **“hatred toward Jews—individually and as a group—that can be attributed to the Jewish religion and/or ethnicity.”** (1)

In 2005, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (now EU Fundamental Rights Agency), developed a more detailed working definition, which states: **“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”** It also adds that **“such manifestations could also target the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity,”** but that **“criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic.”** (2)

Late in 2013, the definition was removed from the website of

the Fundamental Rights Agency. A spokesperson said that it had never been regarded as official and that the agency did not intend to develop its own definition (3). However, despite its disappearance from the website of the Fundamental Rights Agency, the definition has gained widespread international use. The definition has been adopted by the EU Working Group on Antisemitism and in 2010 it was adopted by the US Department of State. Other institutions followed suit.

In 2016, the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) – a body of 31 Member Countries, ten Observer Countries and seven international partner organisations – adopted the following working definition of antisemitism, making it the most widely endorsed definition of antisemitism around the world:

“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.” (4)

The IHRA was also endorsed by the OSCE/ ODIHR, an organization grouping together 57 states (5).

Mark Weitzman, Chair of the IHRA Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial, which proposed the adoption of the definition in 2015, said: “In order to begin to address the problem of antisemitism, there must be clarity about what antisemitism actually is. This is not a simple question. The adopted working definition helps provide guidance in answer to this challenging question. Crucially, the definition adopted by the IHRA is endorsed by experts, is relevant and is of practical applicability.”

Position of HRWF

Due to the confusion prevailing about what is and what is not antisemitism, as well as the abuse of the concept for

political purposes in concrete incidents and situations,

- HRWF avoids the use of the word “antisemitism” as it avoids the use of “islamophobia” for the same reasons
- HRWF uses the term “anti-Jewish” to qualify ideologies, state policies, hate speech, incidents and various forms of violence targeting Jews, their communities, their community buildings...
- HRWF reserves the use of the term “anti-Israel” for writings, speeches, demonstrations... criticizing the State of Israel.

(1) “Report on Global Anti-Semitism”, U.S. State Department, 5 January 2005.

(2) “Working Definition of Antisemitism”. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. Archived from the original on 5 January 2010. Retrieved 24 July 2010.

(3) Jewish Telegraphic Agency (5 December 2013). “What is anti-Semitism? EU racism agency unable to define term”. Jerusalem Post. (<https://bit.ly/20P8Ym0>)

(4) See <https://bit.ly/2ArCQfi> and <https://bit.ly/25wbn73>

(5) See “Understanding Anti-Semitic Hate Crimes and Addressing the Security Needs of Jewish Communities” (<https://www.osce.org/odihr/317166?download=true>)

France expels controversial Salafist preacher to Algeria

France24 (19.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2F7IvpU> – Controversial Salafist preacher, Imam El Hadi Douidi, who was based in the southern French city of Marseille, was expelled to Algeria

Friday morning following a lengthy legal process, according to a French media report.

The 63-year-old preacher – who was born in Algeria and does not have French citizenship – was expelled on Friday, the AFP reported quoting an unnamed French interior ministry source.

The expulsion followed a deportation order issued by the French interior ministry on Tuesday.

But Doudi's expulsion application was suspended pending a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which finally ruled in favour of the deportation on Thursday.

The ruling followed an appeal by the Salafist cleric's lawyer, Nabil Boudi, who argued that his client would be tortured or suffer "inhuman or degrading treatment" if he was returned to Algeria.

The court granted the French government 72 hours "to gather the additional information necessary to make an informed decision". Doudi was held in an administrative detention center pending the court's final ruling.

Sermons targeting women, Jews, Shiites

The imam of the as-Sounna mosque, in the heart of Marseille, was one of the most high profile cases in the French government's effort to combat radicalisation.

The new de-radicalisation plan announced by French President Emmanuel Macron's government includes increased surveillance of Muslim clerics accused of hate speech and incitement to violence.

The as-Sounna mosque was closed in December following allegations that Doudi was provoking discrimination, hatred and violence toward an individual or group.

A confidential government investigative report, seen by the

New York Times, cited numerous sermons by Doudi, where he preached that Jews are “unclean, the brothers of monkeys and pigs”. Women, the preacher stressed, could not leave their homes without authorisation, and an apostate “needs to be eliminated by the death penalty to protect Muslims”.

In its expulsion application, the French Interior Ministry cited the radical imam’s “deliberate incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence against a particular person or group of persons”, notably women, Jews, Shiites and people committing adultery.

Radical clerics under scrutiny

Following a spate of deadly terrorist incidents since the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks, France has tightened its anti-terror laws while attempting to tackle the spread of Islamist extremism particularly in French prisons, schools, mosques and Islamic centres.

Between 2012 and 2015, the French Interior Ministry expelled 40 Muslim clerics while another 52 people – including clerics – were expelled over the past 28 months, according to the New York Times.

In 2017, 20 radicalised foreign nationals were expelled from French territory, according to French Interior Minister Gérard Collomb.

Last month, France expelled Mohammed Tlaghi, a substitute imam at a mosque in Torcy, an eastern Parisian suburb, due to radical sermons, under an expulsion order issued on March 2.

The as-Sounna mosque, where Doudi preached, has been closed since December 11, 2017, when the Marseille police department issued a six-month closure order, which was ratified by France’s top administrative court earlier this year.

(FRANCE 24 with AFP)

Iceland; 500 Icelandic physicians back bill to outlaw circumcision

JTA(23.02.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2CGWSQP> – Hundreds of physicians in Iceland and some of Belgium's top doctors came out in support of a bill proposing to criminalize nonmedical circumcision of boys in the Scandinavian island nation.

The approximately 500 Icelandic physicians who backed the bill that was submitted last month to the parliament cited the World Medical Association's Declaration of Helsinki on ethical principles.

"Potential complications should offset the benefits" of male circumcision, "which are few," the Icelandic physicians wrote in a joint statement published Wednesday.

Advocates of male circumcision include many physicians who believe it reduces the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and genital infections.

In Belgium, several prominent physicians, including Guy T'Sjoen of Ghent University Hospital, told the De Morgen daily they also support a ban.

"As a physician, I find it very regrettable that we have thousands of unnecessary circumcisions annually of boys who can't have their say about it," he said in an interview published Tuesday.

In Denmark, a petition featured on the parliament's website proposing to ban nonmedical circumcision of boys has received

20,000 signatures out of the 50,000 needed to come up for a parliamentary vote as draft resolution. As per a new law, the petition, which was posted on Feb. 1, will remain active for 180 days.

Throughout Scandinavia, the nonmedical circumcision of boys under 18 is the subject of a debate on children's rights and religious freedoms. The children's ombudsmen of all Nordic countries – Finland, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway – released a joint declaration in 2013 proposing a ban, though none of these countries has enacted one.

In the debate, circumcision is under attack from right-wing politicians who view it as a foreign import whose proliferation is often associated mostly with Muslim immigration. And it is also opposed by left-wing liberals and atheists who denounce it as a primitive form of child abuse.

HRWF Comment

It is to be feared that this anti-circumcision campaign will be exploited by anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim actors in a number of other countries.

ERITREA: Gravestones vandalized in Jewish cemetery

JTA (16.01.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2F0St0X> – Dozens of gravestones were toppled and broken in a Jewish cemetery in Eritrea.

The damage at the cemetery located in the capital of Asmara is believed to have happened in recent days, according to two Jewish news outlets that received photos of the vandalism.

The Israel-based Haaretz published photos of the smashed gravestones, reported to be the first time that the Jewish cemetery has been targeted.

“The cemetery suffered vandalism and a large number of graves were defaced,” Danny Goldschmidt, from the Aden Jewish Heritage Museum located in Tel Aviv, told Haaretz. He said that the police have not made any arrests in the incident.

The London-based Jewish Chronicle also was sent photos of the damage by an unnamed reader in London of Eritrean descent, who did not want his name published for fear of retribution against family members who remain in Eritrea.

In addition to cemetery, the site in Asmara site is home to a now-defunct synagogue. The last Jewish family left Eritrea more than ten years ago. There reportedly is one permanent Jewish resident left in the city, who has been identified as Sami Cohen and who reportedly takes care of the cemetery and the synagogue.

The last grave was dug in the cemetery in 1996, Ynet reported in 2006. There are about 150 people buried in the cemetery.

The Jewish Photo Library blog featured a visit and an interview with Sami Cohen in 2015, when he was 67. Cohen, often called “the last Jew of Eritrea,” said he maintains the synagogue, including caring for its two Torah scrolls and Jewish books in the hopes that the Eritrean market will open up, bringing Israeli and Jewish businessmen to the area.

Asmara’s Jewish community numbered as many 500 people in the 1950s, made up of Jews who came from Yemen in the late 19th century due to Italian colonial expansion, and by Jews who fled Europe before and during World War II. Some Jews left Eritrea when Israel became a state, and others left when Eritrea’s 30-year-long fight for independence from Ethiopia reached Asmara. By 1975 the community had shrunk to 150 and by 1993 when Eritrea gained independence Cohen was one of the

only Jews left.

Cohen's wife and children left in the late 1990s. He divides his time between Rome, Tel Aviv and Asmara, according to the blog. Though he was born in Eritrea, Cohen also retains British citizenship.