

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>)