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NL sees highest number of anti-Semitism reports in 30 years

By Janene Pieters

NL.Times.NL (17.02.2020) - https://bit.ly/2SVpm3I - The number of anti-Semitic incidents reported to the Netherlands' information and documentation center on Israel CIDI last year increased by a massive 35 percent compared to the year before. CIDI received 182 reports of discrimination against Jewish people - the highest number since the center started keeping track 30 years ago, NOS reports.

In 2014, CIDI saw a peak in anti-Semitism reports at 171 incidents. "At the time, the anti-Semitism was related to the flare-up of the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. There is no such link in 2019," the center said. The number of incidents decreased to 126 in 2015 and 109 in 2016, after which they started to increase again.

Last year there were particularly more reports of insults, increasing from 18 in 2018 to 44 in 2019. CIDI did not include anti-Semitic expressions on social media, though the center is concerned about it. "Social media companies are still taking too little action against anti-Semitic and other racist expressions on their platforms."

CIDI fears that its figures are just the tip of the iceberg. "What makes the increase all the more poignant is that victims of anti-Semitism rarely make a report to the police, because the fear that a report will lead to nothing.

The police also noted an increase in discrimination reports. Last year 460 incidents of discrimination were reported to the police, 16 percent more than in 2018.

Small group of orthodox Muslims causing problems in mosques, Council of Mosques says

By Janene Pieters

NL.Times.NL (17.02.2020) - https://bit.ly/2P76Nsh - A small group of younger, orthodox Muslims are causing problems in mosques by pressuring other believers to follow a the "strict" course, Said Bouharrou, vice-president of the Council of Moroccan Mosques in the Netherlands, said to the parliamentary committee investigating foreign influence in Dutch Islamic institutions on Monday, NOS reports.

"They are told 'you are not a good Muslim'," Bouharrou said. This small group of orthodox believers also accuse other Muslims of sowing divisions in the faith, he said.

According to Bouharrou, there are 15 to 20 mosques in the Netherlands that are ultra-orthodox and causing problems. And the silent majority does not make itself heard. But he thinks that by acting more strongly, the Muslim community can solve this problem itself. "The solution is that they enter into the public debate," Bouharrou said, adding that this also means speaking out against orthodox or extremist preachers on social media.

Influences from the Gulf states must be tackled, he stressed. "We have to do something to make those influences smaller," Bouharrou said. It is "by definition" undesirable if people from abroad are involved in the boards of Dutch mosques, he said.

The government's role is limited, because acting may infringe on the freedom of religion, Bouharrou said. But certain obligations to openness and transparency, and supporting the "resilience" of the Muslim community can help, he said.

Bouharrou also said that he was shocked by threats aimed at Hajer Harzi of the Al Houda mosque in Geleen, after she spoke to the parliamentary committee. He called her testimony brave. "We need more such heroes in the country," he said.

Monday was the fourth day of witness hearings in an investigation the Tweede Kamer launched after NRC and Nieuwsuur reported that at least 30 Islamic organizations in the Netherlands receive funding from conservative Gulf states like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Earlier this month a group of Islamic organizations asked the Tweede Kamer, the lower house of Dutch parliament, to not focus only on mosques in their investigation, but also look into foreign money flows to political parties, churches and synagogues.