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Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, follow-up and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Written statement* submitted by United Nations Watch, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[21 August 2012]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language received from the submitting non-governmental organization.

Record of Sweden on anti-Jewish racism and its candidacy for UN Human Rights Council

Legal background

Sweden is a signatory to and has ratified both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). The ICCPR guarantees the civil and political rights of all individuals “without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”¹

States party to ICERD pledge to undertake "to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone... to freedom of thought, conscience and religion."² Sweden has committed to observing the terms of these covenants and is obligated to do so under international law.

It is essential that states abide by their responsibilities under international law, and it is particularly important that Sweden does so in light of its current candidacy for membership in the UN Human Rights Council for the period 2013-2015.

Member states of the UN Human Rights Council should set the standard for compliance with international law, respect for human rights, and fulfillment of the terms of international human rights covenants like the ICCPR and ICERD. As promotional material published by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs makes clear, Sweden identifies with these goals. Sweden has declared that "promoting and respecting human rights is a core commitment and a central priority for the Swedish Government... as a member of the UN Human Rights Council, Sweden would be committed to promoting the realization of all human rights... [and] global adherence to international human rights covenants."³ Sweden must work to fully implement these solemn commitments.

Antisemitism in Malmö

Sweden has been praised in the past for combating discrimination. Yet recently there has been an alarming resurgence of discrimination against Jews in the city of Malmö. This phenomenon has not been adequately addressed by the Swedish authorities and is a stain on Sweden's record and reputation as a state in which the human rights of all are respected and non-discrimination enforced.

Malmö has a population of approximately 300,000, of whom only 700 Jews. It is staggering, therefore, that while the city's Jews constitute less than one quarter of one percent of the population, in 2009 they were the victims of nearly 50 percent of Malmö's reported hate crimes. What is more, the local police force's hate crimes coordinator acknowledged that antisemitic offences were likely underreported.⁴ Subsequent years have

¹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 2 (1), accessible at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/ccpr.htm>.

² International Covenant on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, Article 5 (vii), accessible at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cerd.htm>.

³ "Sweden for the Human Rights Council", promotional pamphlet published by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, accessible at <http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/10481/a/187123>.

⁴ The Local, "Jews flee Malmö as antisemitism grows", 27 January 2010, accessible at <http://www.thelocal.se/24632/20100127/>.

continued to show high figures for reported antisemitism in Malmö.⁵ Fredrik Sieradzki, spokesman for Malmö's Jewish community, has said that "it's an established fact that there is an antisemitic current in Malmö. That hasn't changed from one year to the next."⁶

Antisemitic incidents have ranged from racist graffiti and verbal insults to threats, physical violence, and even the detonation of explosive devices outside of Malmö's largest synagogue. Many in Malmö's Jewish community are frightened, and the situation has prompted dozens of Jewish families to leave the city.⁷ Those who remain describe a life marred by persistent antisemitism. One Jew from Malmö, Marcus Eilenberg, says that in recent year's Malmö's Jews have endured "a degree of hate that none of us -- except those who survived the Holocaust -- had experienced before."⁸ Holocaust survivor and Malmö resident Judith Popinski told The Sunday Telegraph that "I never thought I would see this hatred again in my lifetime, not in Sweden anyway."⁹

Specific incidents of Antisemitism in Malmö

Documented antisemitic incidents in Malmö have included the following:

- December 27, 2008: A demonstration organized by the Jewish community for peace in the Middle East was assaulted by a large group of counter-demonstrators chanting "Hitler! Hitler!" and "damn Jews." The counter-demonstrators also threw stones, bottles, a homemade bomb, and other projectiles at those participating in the original demonstration.¹⁰
- January 4, 2009: Arsonists attempted to burn down a Jewish burial chapel. The structure suffered minor damage from soot and smoke.¹¹
- January 13, 2009: Vandals threw Molotov cocktails at the burial chapel of a Jewish cemetery. The synagogue was slightly damaged.¹²
- August 21, 2009: Three young men confronted 19 year old Jonathan Tsubarah, and after identifying him as a Jew proceeded to beat him. They yelled "kill the Jew" as Tsubarah lay on the ground and asked him "now are you proud to be a Jew?"¹³

⁵ The Local, "Antisemitic crimes on the rise in Malmö", 11 November 2011, accessible at <http://www.thelocal.se/37306/20111111/>.

⁶ The Local, "Antisemitic hate crime declines in Malmö: report", 17 July 2011, accessible at <http://www.thelocal.se/34994/20110717/>.

⁷ The Telegraph, "Jews leave Swedish city after sharp rise in antisemitic hate crimes", 21 February 2010, accessible at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/sweden/7278532/Jews-leave-Swedish-city-after-sharp-rise-in-antisemitic-hate-crimes.html>.

⁸ The Washington Times, "Hate Crimes force Jews out of Malmö", 29 March 2010, accessible at <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/mar/29/hate-crimes-force-jews-out-of-malmo/?page=all>.

⁹ The Telegraph, "Jews leave Swedish city after sharp rise in antisemitic hate crimes", 21 February 2010, accessible at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/sweden/7278532/Jews-leave-Swedish-city-after-sharp-rise-in-antisemitic-hate-crimes.html>.

¹⁰ Paulina Neuding, Tablet, "Sweden's 'Damn Jew' Problem", 5 April 2012, accessible at <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/96146/swedens-damn-jew-problem>.

¹¹ Anti-Defamation League, "Global Antisemitism: Selected Incidents Around the World in 2009", accessible at http://www.adl.org/Anti_semitism/antisemitism_global_incidents_2009.asp.

¹² Anti-Defamation League, "Global Antisemitism: Selected Incidents Around the World in 2009", accessible at http://www.adl.org/Anti_semitism/antisemitism_global_incidents_2009.asp.

¹³ The Jewish Daily Forward, "For Jews, Swedish City Is a 'Place To Move Away From'", 7 July 2010, accessible at <http://forward.com/articles/129233/for-jews-swedish-city-is-a-place-to-move-away-f/>.

- July 23, 2010: A small explosion early in the morning blackened the entrance to the synagogue and broke three windows. A note with a bomb threat had been put on the synagogue door the day before.¹⁴
- October 10, 2010: An estimated group of 10 teenagers threw eggs and trash cans at a building where a weekend retreat for Jewish children was taking place. The youths reportedly shouted, "Heil Hitler" and "Jewish pigs" during their attack.¹⁵

Antisemitism in Malmö and the Swedish Authorities

The grave incidents outlined above are compounded by the failure of the local authorities to support victims of antisemitism. Malmö's mayor Ilmar Reepalu actually blamed Malmö's Jews for the discrimination they face. Most recently, he accused the Jewish community of having strong ties with a far-right group, saying that "Sweden Democrats have infiltrated the Jewish community in order to push their hate of Muslims".¹⁶ The implication was that attacks on Jews were therefore somehow justified. Reepalu subsequently admitted to the Dagens Nyheter (DN) daily that he "had no basis" for his defamatory claims, but there was no official censure of his incendiary remarks.

Reepalu has a long history of blaming the victims when it comes to antisemitism in Malmö. After a pro-peace demonstration by the Jewish community was attacked in 2008, Reepalu did not condemn the violence, but said instead that the Jewish community had "sent the wrong signals" by not distancing itself from Israel's actions.¹⁷ At other times, Reepalu has denied the existence of antisemitism altogether, telling The Sunday Telegraph that "there haven't been any attacks on Jewish people, and if Jews from the city want to move to Israel that is not a matter for Malmö".¹⁸ Instead of fighting antisemitism and expressing solidarity with its victims, Reepalu has repeatedly maligned Malmö's Jews and left them to fend for themselves.

It is unacceptable that in Malmö today Jews cannot exercise their right to freedom of religion without fear of violence, harassment, and intimidation. Malmö's Jewish community prays in a synagogue that has been turned into a fortress of bulletproof glass, continuous surveillance, and a permanent security presence. Instead of tackling this reprehensible phenomenon, the local authorities have too often turned a blind eye to it, failed to take it seriously, or blamed the victims. Sweden must respect its commitments under international law and take action against anti-Jewish racism, discrimination and xenophobia in Malmö.

Recommendations

Sweden should demonstrate its commitment to combating anti-Jewish racism through the following five steps:

- Official acknowledgement that the problem of antisemitism in Malmö is genuine and intolerable.

¹⁴ Anti-Defamation League, "Global Antisemitism: Selected Incidents Around the World in 2010", accessible at http://www.adl.org/Anti_semitism/antisemitism_global_incidents_2010.asp.

¹⁵ Anti-Defamation League, "Global Antisemitism: Selected Incidents Around the World in 2010", accessible at http://www.adl.org/Anti_semitism/antisemitism_global_incidents_2010.asp.

¹⁶ The Local, "Malmö mayor in new row with Sweden's Jews", 23 March 2012, accessible at <http://www.thelocal.se/39858/20120323/>.

¹⁷ The Local, "Jews flee Malmö as antisemitism grows", 27 January 2010, accessible at <http://www.thelocal.se/24632/20100127/>.

¹⁸ The Telegraph, "Jews leave Swedish city after sharp rise in antisemitic hate crimes", 21 February 2010, accessible at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/sweden/7278532/Jews-leave-Swedish-city-after-sharp-rise-in-antisemitic-hate-crimes.html>.

- Officially reprimand Malmö mayor Ilmar Reepalu for his multiple defamatory and incendiary remarks concerning the Jewish community in Malmö and the antisemitism it faces.
- Develop and implement special initiatives aimed at educating against antisemitism in Malmö, with a particular emphasis on schools.
- Enhance security around Jewish sites and activities to ensure that they are protected from vandalism, abuse, and assault.
- Allocate sufficient resources to ensure the thorough and timely investigation of antisemitic incidents in Malmö and the prosecution of perpetrators.

Implementing these measures is essential to tackling the problem of antisemitism in Malmö.

Sweden is bound by international law to combating the scourge of antisemitism. ICERD and the ICCPR demand that the human rights of Jews in Malmö be adequately protected. It is time for the Swedish government to demonstrate a serious commitment to ensuring respect for the human rights of all of Malmö's residents. The credibility of Sweden's candidacy for membership in the UN Human Rights Council depends on it.