



THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

18 June 2019

Excellency

I refer to my letter dated 6 June 2019, in which I informed you that I would convene an informal meeting of the General Assembly on “Combatting Antisemitism and Other Forms of Racism and Hate – The Challenges of Teaching Tolerance and Respect in the Digital Age”

I wish to inform you that the meeting will take place on Wednesday, 26 June 2019, from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., in the General Assembly Hall.

It is my honour to share with you a concept note and a programme of the informal meeting of the General Assembly.

I would appreciate your personal and active participation at this meeting.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'M. F. ESPINOSA', which is a stylized representation of the name María Fernanda Espinosa.

María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés

All Permanent Representatives and  
Permanent Observers to the United Nations  
New York

**Combating Antisemitism and Other Forms of Racism and Hate:  
The Challenges of Teaching Tolerance and Respect in the Digital Age**

Informal meeting of the General Assembly

26 June 2019, 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., General Assembly Hall

Background

There are worrying signs that intolerance, racism, xenophobia and discrimination are on the rise in our societies, including in the online world. Most recently, hate crimes have targeted persons of a certain religious, ethnic or other ground, in schools, community centers, museums and places of culture and identity; and some have targeted persons in places of worship – like the most recent terrorist attacks in New Zealand, Sri Lanka and USA. Observing the trends globally, it seems the challenges are greater than ever. Despite this, the international community still lacks a holistic and comprehensive approach to face these growing challenges.

Antisemitism is often referred to as “the oldest hatred” and represents a particularly virulent form of irrational hate and prejudice against a specific group. But Antisemitism is not a problem for Jewish communities alone; it is also a deep-seated threat to democratic societies themselves. Its outbreaks often mark deeper malaise and deep-rooted discriminatory attitudes which are often fueled by conspiracy myths. Regrettably, Antisemitism increasingly intersects with other forms of hatred and prejudice directed against identity-based groups and individuals, including religious, ethnic and sexual identity groups.<sup>1</sup>

All around the world we have seen attacks against Jews<sup>2</sup>. The attack on the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, the deadliest hate crime against Jewish communities in the history of the United States, the attacks on the Poway Synagogue in California, the Jewish school in Toulouse and the Hyper Cacher in Paris, are only the most blatant examples of hate crimes against Jews. Antisemitism unites extremists from various backgrounds and can take many different forms, which must be tackled holistically. If left unchecked, Antisemitism will not only negatively affect Jews, but will also most likely be followed by persecution of other ethnic and religious groups.

The internet has allowed unprecedented progress in connecting people, sharing information and promoting freedom of speech globally. At the same time, it exposes human beings to challenges never seen before, including those linked to public safety and the protection of human dignity. Minority groups, including religious minorities, are particularly exposed to these challenges. Indeed, many hate groups are very active online and use social media to spread hate speech, including of Antisemitic nature. In this context, technology and new media platforms become the vector to spread Antisemitic and Holocaust denial narratives, myths and images. Online hate can result in hate crimes, as we have seen in recent attacks against Jews and other minorities groups. The internet can also be used to spread the videos of hate crimes, which can result in further hate speech and hate crimes being perpetrated. Of note, almost 90% of European Jews assess antisemitism as being most problematic on the internet and on social media

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<sup>1</sup><https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2018/2nd-survey-discrimination-hate-crime-against-jews>

<sup>2</sup>[https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/bnaibrithcanada/pages/394/attachments/original/1524515382/Audit\\_2017\\_English.pdf?1524515382](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/bnaibrithcanada/pages/394/attachments/original/1524515382/Audit_2017_English.pdf?1524515382); <https://www.adl.org/media/12857/download>

Among the initiatives aimed at assessing social media content, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of Antisemitism<sup>3</sup> constitutes a useful guidance tool in education and training, including for law enforcement authorities, in their efforts to identify and investigate Antisemitic attacks more efficiently and effectively.

The UN has focused on the issue of Antisemitism in the past, including through an informal meeting of the Plenary of the General Assembly in 2015 and a High-level Ministerial event hosted under the auspices of the UN Secretary General and UNESCO in September 2018.

#### Purpose of the meeting

This meeting is intended to enable a discussion on ways social media and other digital tools can be used for educational purposes, for instance to share best practices and lessons learned on combating hatred and intolerance. The event will invite reflection on how new media can be used to promote shared values, tolerance and mutual respect, and will examine means of addressing the pervasiveness of dangerous hate speech and its propagation through social media and other online platforms and mitigating its impact on societies.

#### Programme:

9:30 a.m.            Opening  
                          Statement by the President of the General Assembly  
                          Statement by the Secretary-General of the United Nations

9:45 a.m.            Statements  
                          Address by Rabbi Yisroel Goldstein, Chabad of Poway, San Diego, California  
                          Address by Ms. Katharina von Schnurbein, European Coordinator on combating antisemitism  
                          Address by Mr. Ahmed Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief

10:00 a.m.          Interventions from Member States and Observers

12:30 p.m.          End of the event

Delegations are invited to intervene during the informal meeting, with a time limit of three minutes for individual delegations and five minutes for statements made on behalf of groups. The list of speakers for the high-level segment will be established in accordance with the practice of the General Assembly, subject to the availability of time. For inscriptions on the list of speakers please contact the General Assembly Affairs Branch, Mr. Carlos Galindo (email: galindo@un.org; +1 (212) 963-5063), with copy to gaspeakerslist@un.org).

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism>