

AJC's Jacob Blaustein Institute Partners with UN on New Policy for Combating Holocaust and Genocide Denial

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American Jewish Committee →

Jun 16, 2022, 17:03 ET

NEW YORK, June 16, 2022 /PRNewswire/ -- American Jewish Committee (AJC) welcomes the publication by the UN Special Adviser on Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, of a new policy paper on combating Holocaust and genocide denial. The paper was produced in collaboration with AJC's Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights (JBI).

"Holocaust denial is rooted in antisemitism," emphasizes Nderitu in the policy paper's foreword, adding that her office is also "extremely worried about the increasingly frequent distortions of the Holocaust's scope and intentionality." Nderitu emphasizes that denying the facts of the Holocaust and other genocides generates fear among victims, "constitutes a warning sign of societal fragility" and "can inspire and fuel hatred of, or even incite violence against, communities that previously experienced atrocity crimes."

Expressing alarm about the increasing prevalence of Holocaust denial and distortion online and offline at a time when record-high levels of antisemitic incidents have been reported in many countries, the policy

paper urges UN system actors to reject expressions of Holocaust denial and distortion and actively encourage measures to curb its spread while respecting human rights standards, particularly the right to freedom of expression.

"The UN policy paper is groundbreaking because it emphasizes that all of the world body's personnel should act in ways that clearly reflect its support for all communities that have experienced genocide and atrocity crimes, and specifically highlights that Jewish communities continue to be threatened by the antisemitic attitudes and incidents that Holocaust denial fuels," said Felice Gaer, Director of AJC's JBI. "Special Adviser Nderitu is to be applauded for courageously and clearly communicating to the UN system that the threat posed to Jews, and to entire societies, by continuing Holocaust denial and distortion is serious, and that UN officials should condemn it, even when doing so may be politically difficult, because their silence may be interpreted as condoning it."

The new policy paper's detailed recommendations emerged from an expert brainstorming session convened in December 2021 by AJC's JBI and the UN's Genocide Prevention Office. Some recommendations are directed to the UN itself, including guidance that all UN actors should:

- receive instruction on recognizing and understanding Holocaust denial and distortion, with reference to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion.
- regularly consult with representatives of communities that have experienced atrocity crimes to understand their concerns.
- engage with government officials, encouraging them to condemn Holocaust distortion and denial.
- incorporate teaching about the Holocaust and genocides in higher education and training for civil servants, not limiting such learning to secondary school educational settings, and use the teaching aid on Holocaust Denial, Distortion and Trivialization developed by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.
- urge social media companies to avoid amplifying Holocaust denial and distortion; recognize in their community standards that it can cause revictimization, repeat historical patterns of discrimination and negative stereotypes, and incite hostility and violence; and mitigate the impact of Holocaust and genocide denial and distortion through varying forms of content moderation, including but not limited to removing content.

The UN-JBI paper also offers important guidance on laws prohibiting Holocaust denial and distinguishes between these protective laws and broader so-called "memory laws" that bar the refutation of narratives denying national or communal complicity in the Holocaust or other atrocity crimes, which have been used to punish victims and otherwise curtail speech that human rights law protects.

No previous UN document has addressed these complicated issues in such specificity or detail.

SOURCE American Jewish Committee

