



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice

The battle against anti-Semitism and racism must always be fought

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Today we mark Holocaust Remembrance Day. Seventy-one years have now passed since the death and concentration camp Auschwitz was liberated and the whole world was able to see the appalling images of the victims of Nazism. The Holocaust committed against six million Jews and the genocide of half a million Roma and 2.5 million Poles and other minorities, homosexuals, sick people and political dissidents was one of the most terrible crimes of the 20th century.

The Jews and members of other minorities who fell victim to the Holocaust were murdered because they belonged to an ethnic minority group. How could anti-Semitism and racism have had such an influence in Europe, enabling the Holocaust to happen? There are of course many explanations and the answer is not a straightforward one, but the radicalisation of the 1930s and 1940s, the hate propaganda and divisions in Europe, as well as the inability of the democratic forces to take timely action against anti-Semitism and fascism most certainly played an important role.

It must never happen again. The responsibility for managing the memory of the Holocaust is therefore a matter of both honouring the memory of the millions of victims and combating anti-Semitism and racism. Knowledge is an antidote against anti-Semitism, Afrophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Ziganism and fascism. The Government is conducting a number of measures to ensure that the atrocities of Nazism and racism are not forgotten. The Living History Forum has been given a broader mandate, the National Agency for Education is carrying out initiatives to improve knowledge in schools and a national plan against racism is being implemented.

But spreading knowledge is not enough. Anti-Semitism and racism are still prevalent in Sweden and Europe. In Europe, anti-Semitism is once again claiming lives. The terrorist attack against a kosher shop in connection with the massacre at the editorial office of magazine Charlie Hebdo in January last year, the terrorist attack against the Copenhagen synagogue in February last year and the attack against the Jewish Museum in Brussels in 2014 are three examples.

This development is utterly unacceptable. One of the fundamental duties of a state under the rule of law is to protect citizens against violence and threats, especially when they are perpetrated by groups and people who do not accept the fundamental principle of the equal value of all people. In both Sweden and other EU countries, security services are now taking forceful action to combat Daesh and other terrorist groups.

In Sweden too, unacceptable attacks against Jews have occurred. The Government is aware that the total number of reported hate crimes and hate crimes with anti-Semitic motives are on the rise; for this reason, more measures need to be carried out to combat these hate crimes. The Swedish Police Authority is raising its level of ambition and greater resources are being invested in combating hate crimes. All cities and large towns now have special departments within the police force to combat this type of crime. We will see the establishment of a national consultation forum, in which representatives of vulnerable groups can have a direct dialogue with the police and other government agencies so as to improve cooperation concerning hate crimes. The Government will closely monitor the work of the police so that these measures genuinely result in more hate crimes being solved. The Swedish Commission for Government Support to Faith Communities will also distribute a minimum of SEK 10 million to faith communities for measures to enhance security.

The battle for the equal value of all people and against anti-Semitism and racism is a part of foreign policy. Sweden and the EU have a major duty to stand up for the values of the freedom and equal rights of all people upon which our societies are based when we formulate and conduct our foreign policy. Sweden is also working to strengthen a culture of dialogue and promote democratic developments so as to undermine the conditions that foster extremism. Xenophobia, hopelessness and distance from political processes do not create extremist ideologies, but they make people more susceptible to fascist, racist and anti-Semitic ideas. This work is being done not least through setting priorities for Swedish development cooperation.

Events in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s show that racism can threaten the democratic order. Anti-Semitism and racism are not just a threat against the groups targeted by such hatred; they are a threat against society as a whole. In this sense, our open and democratic society is also a victim of the threats and attacks that target individual groups, such as Jewish communities, because these attacks strike the foundation of our country: an open, democratic, free and inclusive society.

The battle against anti-Semitism must always be fought. It is a battle for the rights of individuals, but also for an open and democratic society.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Anders Ygeman, Minister for Home Affairs