

Informal meeting of the General Assembly to address concerns of a rise in Anti-semitic violence worldwide, 22 January 2015

Statement by H.E. Einar Gunnarsson, Permanent Representative

Iceland welcomes this informal meeting of the General Assembly and we thank the President of the General Assembly together with the initiating states for arranging this timely discussion.

We are living through a period in which racism and xenophobia are particularly prevalent. In this age of globalisation, when all societies are experiencing the challenges of diversity and racism and xenophobia threaten the ability of peaceful societies to live together in harmony and in tolerance of each other's beliefs and culture.

Of great concern is the new tide of anti-semitism which has swept across Europe in recent months and years. We were particularly shocked by the recent attacks on Jewish institutions and places of prayer and Jewish owned businesses, in the south of France some months ago, in Brussels last year and in Paris very recently. But these are just the most visible manifestations of a worrying increase in attacks on individuals in Europe and elsewhere because of their Jewish identity. Also worrying is the continuing dissemination of hate speech, particularly online. The revival in these age-old manifestations of hatred and prejudice is particularly shocking given the history in Europe.

Iceland has little direct experience of anti-semitism, though racism of various types has reared its ugly head from time to time, as in every community. But we view such manifestations as not only an attack on one group but also on the fundamental values we hold most dear. Iceland joins other member states in condemning unconditionally all forms of racism and xenophobia, including anti-semitism.

The Government of Iceland is keenly aware of the need to combat all forms of racism and manifestations of religious based intolerance, including anti-Semitism. The Government of Iceland is staunchly committed to fighting anti-semitism and any other types of racism or xenophobia. The Icelandic constitution prohibits discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, and two provisions of the General Penal Code specifically safeguard against such discrimination.

But laws are not enough. We must all practice constant vigilance in the face of intolerance of the views and culture of others, of which anti-semitism is a prime example.