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Amnesty UK – Help Us to Understand

Anti-Semitism in the UK is rising. Violence, desecration and abuse has gripped families and communities. In its 2014 report, The Community Security Trust in the UK reported the highest number of anti-Semitic incidents it has ever recorded. In London, the Metropolitan police recorded a 137 percent rise in anti-Semitic crime in 2014.

Given this data, it was disappointing that Amnesty International UK's 53rd National Conference and Annual General Meeting in Warwick on April 18th and 19th defeated a call for Amnesty's UK chapter to "campaign against anti-Semitism in the UK" and to "lobby the UK Government to do more to tackle the rise in anti-Semitic attacks in Britain, whether physical or verbal, online or in person." The resolution called for the UK Government to "monitor anti-Semitism closely and periodically review the security of Britain's Jewish population."

That is not to say that Amnesty International UK was not busy. The chapter authorized action on a range of serious matters (including on human rights issues in Colombia, campaigns on human rights abuses associated with asylum detention, and action on immigration detention of human trafficking and torture victims). In fact, they adopted every resolution presented -- except the one calling for action on anti-Semitism in the UK.

Amnesty International UK's Press and PR Officer Neil Durkin responded to inquiries regarding the resolution's defeat saying: "After a really interesting debate where everyone condemned discrimination against all ethnic and religious groups, our membership decided not to pass this resolution calling for a campaign with a single focus. Amnesty International fights against discrimination in all its forms, and will continue to do so."

But the data shows that Amnesty does pursue campaigns against the persecution of individuals for their specific religious beliefs. In 2012, Amnesty released an important report, "Choice and Prejudice: a Summary: Discrimination against Muslims in Europe." Just this past February, they condemned -- and rightfully so -- the detention of church leaders in Sudan. So it's hard to understand why Amnesty decided to stay silent in the face of increased violence and harassment against Jews.

I applaud Amnesty International's work to combat discrimination against Muslims and Christians and against discrimination in "all its forms," but I am concerned. Why does it appear that some religious groups in need readily earn Amnesty's attention, energy and resources but not others? It is our responsibility to protect people of all religious traditions and to use our voices to advocate that people of all beliefs, and none, live in freedom from fear.

Respect is a language we all can speak. And one we should all speak loudly.

Joyce S. Dubensky
CEO