



Combating Antisemitism: The Never Again Association's Enduring Battle

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In the early '90s, amid the promise of Poland's transition to democracy, a group of young visionaries were also witnessing the alarming rise of extreme right-wing ideologies and decided to do something about it. Inspired by the courage of those who resisted the Nazis, they founded the Never Again Association, a beacon of hope aimed at eradicating antisemitism, xenophobia, and racism from Polish society.

The Holocaust provides a starting point for activism

To Dr. Rafal Pankowski, one of the Association's founders, there is an indelible connection between combating antisemitism and remembering the Holocaust. "The Holocaust provides a context to everything we do – a context that's impossible to forget," he emphasized while reflecting on the Association's genesis.

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Initially, the phrase "Never Again" resonated with the group as a testament to the Holocaust's horrors and a vow to prevent its recurrence. Over time, its significance for the Association has broadened, inspiring a broad movement against racism and discrimination, and for respect, inclusivity and diversity.

Discovering common challenges in diverse settings

The Association's work has shown that safeguarding the truth of the Holocaust is pivotal to upholding fundamental human rights on a global scale.

Together with partner organizations in regions seemingly distant from where the Holocaust took place, such as Southeast Asia, the Never Again Association has launched projects like ["Identifying and Countering Holocaust Distortion: Lessons for and from Southeast Asia,"](#) which was funded by an IHRA Grant. Their project's conclusions were clear: Holocaust denial goes hand in hand with the denial of other genocides.

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That hatred is often interconnected can also be seen in the Association's work to fight antisemitism following the start of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine. The influx of Ukrainian refugees into Poland sparked a resurgence of antisemitic conspiracy theories among the far-right, intertwining

hate towards refugees with hate towards Jews. A toxic discourse has emerged positing Jews and Ukrainians as malevolent forces conspiring against Poland.

“The protagonists of hate target all groups,” Dr. Pankowski underlined. “If we care about human rights, we need to tackle all forms of hate rather than just one.” With this in mind, the Association has closely monitored hate crime and hate speech against Ukrainian refugees, recognizing it as part of a dangerous pattern.

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Such discourse is part of a broader trend towards polarization that extends far beyond how Polish society responds to refugees from Ukraine, one which has only intensified since the 7 October Hamas attacks.

Amid a tumultuous political landscape, and even when it finds itself in the crosshairs of political tensions, the Never Again Association remains dedicated to building bridges and fostering dialogue in a polarized world. The disturbing trends of intolerance and unwillingness to engage in constructive dialogue weaken our bonds with one another and make us more vulnerable to extremist points of view, Dr. Pankowski stressed.

The IHRA working definitions of antisemitism and of Holocaust denial and distortion as a guiding light through daunting new realities

In navigating these challenges, [the IHRA’s working definition of antisemitism](#) and its [working definition of Holocaust denial and distortion](#) serve as a guiding light. Dr. Pankowski underscores their utility in identifying and monitoring hate speech. For organizations like the Never Again Association, they provide a robust framework for effectively identifying and combating antisemitism on a global scale.

Doing so is increasingly important. “The prevalence of antisemitism in the media and political discourse is deeply troubling and not something I expected to see during my lifetime,” he confessed. Nearly three decades since its inception, the Never Again Association finds itself confronted with new and daunting realities.

Yet, anchored by a steadfast commitment to the principles of “never again,” it stands as a beacon of hope in the fight against contemporary antisemitism. Amid the turbulence of today’s climate, the Association’s unwavering dedication serves as a testament to the enduring power of resistance and resilience in the face of hatred.

The Never Again Association was a 2020 IHRA Grant winner. The IHRA Grant call for 2024 will open for applications in July. For more information and to apply:
<https://holocaustremembrance.com/what-we-do/what-we-fund>

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<https://holocaustremembrance.com/news/combating-antisemitism-never-again-association>