

'A stain on Norwegian history': Jewish community leaders say state-backed groups fuel antisemitism

DIASPORA AFFAIRS: In the black-and-white paradigm of the Norwegian mentality, Israel is bad and Palestinians are good.

<https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-867224>



‘THE VERY institutions meant to protect us are the ones telling us that our experiences are not valid.’ While the issues facing Norway’s Jews existed before October 7, there have been undeniable escalations since then.(photo credit: Fishman/ullstein bild via Getty Images/JTA)By [MATHILDA HELLER](#)SEPTEMBER 12, 2025

22:02Updated: SEPTEMBER 13, 2025 22:31

OSLO - ‘The current government has been a total failure when it comes to speaking out against [rising antisemitism](#),” Rolf Kirschner, the former leader of the Jewish community of Oslo, told *The Jerusalem Post* from his home in the country’s capital.

While the issues facing the 1,500 or so Jews in Norway existed long before Hamas’s attacks in Israel on October 7, there have been undeniable escalations since then. Part of this is due to the stance of Norway’s political echelon, part is due to the media.

Following October 7, Norway’s Foreign Affairs Minister Espen Barth Eide advised King Harald V not to send a letter of condolences to Israel. While the reasoning was that “it is

considered natural that any condolences in the present case come from the government,” the majority of the Jewish community look on this incident as a betrayal.

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“It was a [stain on Norwegian history](#),” Kirschner added. He also lamented how it took Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre four days to refer to Hamas as a terrorist group.

The key to understanding [Norway’s](#) attitudes to the conflict, he said, lies in the Norwegian psyche: “Norwegians like to root for the underdog. It’s something that has been built up since the days of the Soviet Union.” For Norwegians, the underdog is not Israel but Gaza. In the black-and-white paradigm of the Norwegian mentality, Israel is bad and Palestinians are good-



The Holocaust Center in Oslo, Norway, August 25, 2025. (credit: Courtesy Mathilda Heller)“This thing about Israel goes deep. Norway was Israel’s No. 1 ally for the first 20 years of Israel’s existence. And then Israel somehow disappointed the Norwegian peaceful mind,” Kirschner continued. Moreover, Kirschner believes “the conflict in the Middle East is beyond the realm of Norway’s understanding.”

But the issues go much deeper than statements (or lack thereof) from politicians.

Jewish groups say Norwegian-backed groups fuel antisemitism

Norway has its own “Action Plan Against [Antisemitism](#),” the first of which ran from 2016 to 2020, the second from 2021 to 2024, and now the new one, which will run from 2025 to 2030.

The Action Plan has admirable intentions: It aims to develop knowledge about racism, antisemitism, harassment, and discrimination, ensure security and right of expression regardless of ethnic origin or religion, and to improve the safety of children and young people. As part of the plan, funding is provided to a variety of organizations, such as the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies and the No Hate Speech Movement Norway.

However, these same organizations receiving money to combat antisemitism have instead helped to propagate it, members of the Jewish community told the *Post*. Whether by providing a platform only for anti-Zionist Jews, accusing Israel of genocide, or not combating hate against Jewish individuals, the organizations there to fight the fight have instead fueled the fire.

Institutional failures

Following October 7, a young Jewish person named A. was interviewed by No Hate Speech about their experiences of antisemitism, mentioning Zionism only briefly. The video was posted to No Hate Speech’s social media, and was soon met with a deluge of hateful and antisemitic comments. Instead of defending A., responding to the comments, or policing the comment section, No Hate Speech took down the video and apologized – not to A., but for posting the video.

According to the Action Plan, the organization has the “knowledge and skills necessary to identify hate speech, including antisemitism, and take action against human rights infringements online.” However, A.’s father’s dealings with No Hate Speech seem to suggest otherwise.



Anti-Israel graffiti in Solli District, Oslo, August 2025. (credit: MATHILDA HELLER) A.'s father told the *Post* that his child was distraught over what happened, so he rang No Hate Speech, which said it would put the video back up on Nakba Day, and that it would remove the mentions of Israel or Zionism.

"My child's story about antisemitism has nothing to do with Nakba Day," A.'s father said. "Instead of protecting Jews, they protected antisemites."

The *Post* quizzed two of the three leaders of the No Hate Speech Movement Norway about the incident while in Oslo. One of the heads of the organization took responsibility for the incident, saying they "handled it poorly" and that there "was nothing controversial about A.'s feelings about antisemitism, even about Zionism."

A. then said that the decision to remove the video "definitely" came from a fear of the loud anti-Israel voice.

"Having experienced the debate climate in Norway, the pro-Palestinian narrative is extremely strong and especially in the anti-racist movement. So we are trying to shed light on Jewish perspectives and antisemitism in the last years. It's been extremely challenging in our experience."

Throughout the conversation with No Hate Speech, the *Post* noted that Islamophobia was mentioned in the majority of responses to questions about antisemitism.

Likewise, when asked whether No Hate Speech was comfortable with letting Jews define anti-Zionism as antisemitism, she said “it’s not up to us to say what Zionism is; it’s up to us to give space for minority youth to share their own experiences with hate speech and how we can together combat that.” She went on to highlight that she knows many “young people that are Jews; some define themselves as Zionists, some don’t.”

Then there is the Holocaust Center, whose director, Jan Heiret, recently said it is likely Israel is committing a genocide in Gaza.

“Based on the fact that leading researchers are increasingly in agreement, it is likely that a genocide is taking place in the Gaza Strip, at least in a political and social sense,” Heiret told *Aftenposten* in June.

Louise Kahn, founder of Kos & Kaos: The Nordic Jewish Network, and Robert Hercz, the head of B’nai B’rith Norway also spoke of Heiret’s “distortion” when he chose to mention Gaza during his speech on International Holocaust Remembrance Day 2025.

“Many saw this as inappropriate, revitalizing the Holocaust and feeding the dangerous narrative that equates Israel with perpetrators of genocide,” Kahn told the *Post*.

There is also a separate scandal now involving the center’s plans to place equal weight on the Holocaust of Norwegian Jews and Roma people, despite the fact that not a single Norwegian Roma was deported from the country or killed during the Holocaust.

“While the suffering of Roma people deserves recognition, this framing ignores the fact that Jews in Norway were systematically deported and murdered through a land operation carried out in collaboration with Norwegian authorities,” Kahn and Berit Reisel, former director of the center, said. The two explained that the Jewish community essentially feels that it is being cut out of its own history, and that the center set up through restitution funds to represent Jewish trauma and antisemitism is instead whitewashing it.

The *Post* raised this in a visit to the Holocaust Center. Heiret told the *Post* that it is his duty under the center’s mandate to discuss modern genocide and modern risks of genocide.

“We have a [very broad mandate](#). Of course, Holocaust and antisemitism, that’s why we are here, but at the same time, we work with all kinds of racism, such as Islamophobia. It’s our identity to combine the Holocaust as a historic, unique event and yet also universal, the universal consequences with international law, human rights, and contemporary genocides.

“Some parts of the Jewish community don’t think that I should criticize the Israeli government in any way, but that’s impossible. The escalation of the war in May and June, what’s happening in Gaza now, it’s so obvious that the Israeli government is breaking humanitarian laws.”

Heiret said he did not claim Israel is committing genocide, but that it's "important for the international community now to try to stop what's going on in Gaza." He did, however, accuse Israel of "ethnic cleansing" in Gaza.

"We're not doing a comparison with the Holocaust in that we are not saying that the Israeli government is doing the same as the Nazis, but there are some parts of the policies or in warfare that are comparable, such as ethnic cleansing, and dehumanizing language."

In terms of Zionism, the center "defends Israel's right to exist." However, Heiret said "Zionism is a very difficult concept, there are very many definitions, and some of them difficult to defend." At the end of the conversation, he encouraged the *Post* to speak to the anti-Zionist pro-Palestinian Jewish group.

This links to what Kahn says is a persistent problem with tokenization. "These institutions often include fringe anti-Zionist voices as representatives of Jewish opinion, thus contributing to a form of tokenization, minimizing the wider concerns from the Jewish communities regarding the connection between anti-Zionism and antisemitism.

"Government funding continues to flow toward institutions that are openly anti-Zionist and unwilling to discuss the link between antisemitism and anti-Zionism."

For example, the yearly commemoration of Kristallnacht in Norway is organized by the same state-funded organizations tasked with fighting racism, yet which perpetuate a distorted view of antisemitism that excludes the lived experiences of Jews in Norway, Kahn said.

"This event has been entirely hijacked by pro-Palestinian and anti-Zionist groups, turning it into an anti-Israel tirade," she said, adding that most of the Jewish community has stopped participating altogether and has been made to organize its own event.

One of the organizers of the Kristallnacht event is the Anti-Racism Center, of whose employees about a quarter are wearing keffiyehs in their biographies, and whose chief strategist – Sofia Rana – is pictured on Facebook with a rifle and the caption "at an anti-imperialist summer camp."

The Anti-Racism Center refused to meet with the *Post*.

Impacts on the Jewish Community

Hercz, outside of being the director of B'nai B'rith Norway, talks with Norwegian 10th graders immediately after their trips to Auschwitz (the trips are organized by Aktive Fredsreiser ("Active Travel for Peace")).

"I tell them about my father, who survived Auschwitz," he told the *Post* in Oslo. "I put antisemitism into context. He was 15. His mother was gassed. I play some clips of him.

“Everyone is talking about genocide, including the director of the Norwegian Holocaust Center,” he lamented. “How am I supposed to explain to these kids the difference between the two, when the Holocaust is being whitewashed by a lot of politicians? And the director of the Holocaust Center – he is saying the Jews are committing genocide against the Palestinians, and I’m going to talk about the genocide there? In my family?”

Hercz recalled a recent conversation with a parent who had accompanied their child’s class on a visit to Auschwitz. “This notion of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth goes far too far,” the parent had told him. “I cannot understand how the Jews, who themselves endured genocide, can now be doing the same to the Palestinians in Gaza.”

“Even the director at the Norwegian Center for Holocaust Research says so,” the parent added.

“This is creating a lot of problems for me, for us, for the generation to come,” Hercz said. “The Holocaust Center is now whitewashing, it’s legitimizing everyone shouting genocide.”

Norwegian B’nai B’rith sent a letter to the board of the Holocaust Center in January 2025 asking it to reconsider Heiret’s position, because the community no longer has confidence in Heiret’s ability to convey the real story about the genocide in the Holocaust.

“All Jewish wealth was confiscated during the war, and this wasn’t recognized until 1999, when the Jewish community in Oslo received money, and then other places such as museums received money as part of this [restitution] package,” Hercz continued.

According to him, the research center has “gone way above what it’s supposed to work with,” and has a duty to not “stab the Jewish community in the back.”

“The director should say, ‘Sorry it’s not in my mission to talk about what’s happening there.’”

Heiret, however, disagreed with this when speaking to the *Post*. He again cited the broad mandate of the center, as a way of explaining what he believes is his duty to speak up.

“We can’t avoid the discussion of these risk factors [of genocide],” he told the *Post*, citing the second branch of the center’s mandate, which is to look at contemporary hate and modern risks of genocide. “So we can’t solve it by not talking about it. This is truly a dilemma, and I have to find a way to criticize Israeli warfare in a way that does not tend towards antisemitism. But, of course, when we are going into that, some people would interpret my statements as fueling antisemitism.

“To not make a statement is also a statement,” Heiret continued. “It’s not possible to keep the center out of all these debates.”

This is all part of a wider issue in Norway, community member Lisa Huseby told the *Post*. “The issue is you aren’t able to flip the script. In Norway, they do not see the sources; they just see the media. They don’t care about the Jewish community; it’s too small.”

She quoted former Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland’s New Year’s Eve speech on January 1, 1992, in which she said, “It’s typically Norwegian to be a good person.”

Translating it to modern day, Huseby said Norwegians now believe “if you are on the side of good, you are on the side of not killing babies and so on.”

Jiri Muller, another community member, corroborated: “Ordinary Norwegians cannot believe evil exists; they cannot comprehend that what happened with Hamas is possible.”

“Norwegians are both conflict-avoidant and moralistic, which leads to them taking the path of least resistance,” Rabbi Shaul Wilhelm of Oslo’s Chabad told the *Post*. Norwegians are also highly influenced by the media, which are decidedly anti-Israel.

Certain behaviors have started to emerge which, as Rabbi Wilhelm said, are “so non-Norwegian.” For example, the rabbi, who is one of the few visibly Jewish people in the country, has been spat at and shouted at on several occasions.

He spoke of many other incidents: a Jewish child was called a “baby killer” and had to move schools; a child with autism was called a “Jewish retard,” and a Jewish mother had to hide her menorah before her child’s friend came over.

Recently, Chabad asked the government for permission to build a mikveh under the Chabad house. Later, the rabbi discovered that his neighbor, whom he had never had a bad interaction with, had written to the municipality to request that they not permit the mikveh to be built. “It will bring terrorism to the area,” the neighbor wrote.

“This is so alien to Norway,” Rabbi Wilhelm, who has lived in the country for 21 years, reiterated.

But such incidents seemed all too common during the *Post*’s

visit. The Red Party, campaigning ahead of the election, was shouting in the street “No Jews in Norway,” and handed out flyers saying “Zionism is racism” during a school visit.

Nevertheless, Rabbi Wilhelm stressed that one positive has come out of rising antisemitism, which is the increase of Jews “coming back” to Judaism. “Jews are standing up and saying ‘I am Jewish and I am proud.’ People are laying tefillin, coming to Shabbat dinners, praying, coming to the community for the first time.”

The Oslo Orthodox Jewish community has created one such space, with lively Shabbat dinners, a heder, and religious services. For cultural and come-as-you-are Jewish spaces, there is organization Kos & Kaos, which is home to anyone regardless of their religious affiliation. Attending events, the Post met many people who had only begun attending after October 7 and are now active community members.

But these organizations need funding to continue, and there is palpable frustration that so much funding to combat antisemitism is given to organizations that perpetuate it.

“The very institutions meant to protect us are the ones telling us that our experiences are not valid, that we are “overreacting,” and that what we recognize as antisemitism is not really antisemitism at all,” Kahn reiterated.

The community’s next goal: get the institutions that have been allocated money to fight antisemitism (and which are causing more of it) to return the money to the community itself. Kos & Kaos are establishing an anti-antisemitism task force to reclaim agency and take control of the situation, Kahn said.

“We have nowhere to turn to with what we have experienced, but our voices will not be silenced,” she concluded.

Helene Malting Stray, the chairwoman of The Norwegian Association of Jewish Youth, told the Post on Saturday that while they were very disappointed about the incident with No Hate Speech, they have since had a constructive dialogue with the organization. “We appreciate that they took our concerns seriously and hope to strengthen our partnership to combat antisemitism,” Malting added.