

Country Visit: The Netherlands
Report of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chair-in-Office
on Combating Anti-Semitism, Rabbi Andrew Baker
March 13-17, 2011

Introduction

The Jews of the Netherlands constitute a stable, well-integrated community that numbers about 50,000 and is reflected in active liberal and orthodox religious streams and diverse political voices. Their Holocaust trauma has been immortalized in the story of Anne Frank, whose place of hiding has become both an international pilgrimage site and a center for tolerance education. The identifiable Jewish background of prominent individuals such as Foreign Minister Uri Rosenthal and former Amsterdam Mayor Job Cohen has been no barrier to their political success. By most standard measures this is a largely positive, even enviable picture.

And yet there is today an intensive discussion about the rise of anti-Semitism and the response of government, with some voices even questioning whether there is a future for Jews in the country. Coincidental to my visit the Dutch Parliament held its own debate on the problem.

In some measure this is due to the growth of the Muslim (primarily Moroccan) immigrant community, which is identified as the primary source for verbal and physical assaults against Jews according to the Amsterdam municipal office that fields such complaints. With this in mind a veteran political leader, now retired, has suggested that “visibly identifiable” (i.e., Orthodox) young Dutch Jews might be better off if they left the Netherlands for Israel or the United States.

However, one Jewish journalist also describes a “salon” anti-Semitism that contributes equally to the discomfort. And a professional monitor of the situation says there has been a noticeable change on the part of the general public over the last ten years leaving the Jewish community more isolated even on issues unrelated to the Middle East.

Several particular issues that are the focus of current debate also reflect some of the larger issues that must be addressed.

Legislation to ban ritual slaughter

An active but small animal rights party in the Dutch Parliament has proposed legislation that would mandate the stunning of animals before their slaughter, which would effectively outlaw the method required according to the Jewish laws of *kashrut*. By some accounts support for the legislation is also fueled by anti-Muslim sentiments, based on the (largely erroneous) assumption that it would also prevent the production

of *halal* meat. However, its adverse impact on the Jewish Community is unquestioned. Although religious freedom is constitutionally protected in the Netherlands, its largely secular society seems sympathetic to the legislation and most political leaders have been reluctant to oppose it. One Jewish community leader maintains that their public argument should be based on the “unproven scientific evidence” that stunning is in fact more humane rather than on what some will characterize as “religious fundamentalism.” Dutch Jews are not suggesting that this legislation is motivated by anti-Semitism. Rather, they see it as part of a larger anti-religious agenda in Dutch society coupled with a “politically correct” stance by the Government that is unwilling to give any special considerations to its Jewish community.

Jewish Community Security Needs

There are genuine fears in the Jewish community that their communal institutions have become potential targets of attack from anti-Semitic elements in Dutch society and from terrorists. As a result they require special security measures to provide increased physical protection to the buildings and to the people who use them. Some Jewish leaders estimate that this could cost the community as much as one million Euro. In fact, these assessments are in keeping with similar decisions being made by other Jewish communities in Western Europe. Government officials, while conceding that the community may feel itself insecure, insist that the danger of terrorism is small, and any security enhancements should be the community’s responsibility. It has also been said that, if special assistance is provided for the security of synagogues the Government would be obligated to extend similar help to the more numerous mosques in the country, as well. Jewish leaders, who maintain that actual security needs are not the same, cite this policy as another example of “political correctness” putting them at risk.

It should be noted—and the Dutch Parliament should be commended—that on March 9, the Parliament adopted a resolution relating to this subject, asking the Government, “...to enter into talks with municipalities and Jewish institutions (educational and otherwise) so as to find a solution for the disproportionately high security costs the institutions face.”

Football

Unfortunately, sports fans in many countries may resort to racist and anti-Semitic taunts directed toward their opponents in the course of spirited, well-attended football matches. But, this has been a special problem when it comes to Amsterdam’s Ajax Football Club, which is viewed as a “Jewish” team, albeit reflecting its history rather than the current roster of players. As a result fans of the team have frequently draped themselves in Israeli flags as a means of showing their support. In return the supporters of rival clubs respond with anti-Semitic shouts such as, “ Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the Gas” and “Kill the Jews.” Admittedly, they may not harbor personal anti-Jewish feelings when doing so, but nevertheless they give a very loud voice to some of the most awful,

hate-filled expressions. Despite the context, it is very hard for any Dutch Jew to slough off such language when hearing it.

Monitoring Anti-Semitism

The Netherlands maintains a national center for collecting data on hate on the Internet. Its director reports that anti-Semitism has largely moved from “real life” to the Internet. By this he means that street manifestations such as verbal assaults or written pamphlets have diminished, but these same expressions now appear with growing frequency on the Internet. The Center does not have the resources for monitoring Internet traffic, but will act when complaints are posted. About ninety percent of anti-Semitic postings are removed voluntarily when requests are received. Very few cases will ultimately go to police and to trial, which can take years and typically result in only modest fines and brief physical detention. The source of anti-Semitism on the Internet appears primarily to be Dutch, right-wing extremists, and the tone of such anti-Semitism—along with other hate speech—appears to have become harsher in recent years.

The Amsterdam municipality maintains an office where anti-Semitic (and other hate-related) complaints can be filed, and most are received via email. It has recorded a total of 41 in 2009 and 29 in 2010 out of a total of 966 in each year. Most actual incidents that are reported appear to identify Moroccan perpetrators while anti-Semitic postings on the Internet are linked to the extreme right. This office encourages police mediation to resolve reported incidents and indicates that less than ten percent will end up in court. Its director says people are discouraged because often nothing happens, and the time between filing a complaint and actual prosecution can be one year or more. As a result many more incidents may go unreported, and, as the office director says, “If you do not report, it does not exist.” Additionally, the police have no special designation for anti-Semitic incidents, which will also result in underreporting.

Addressing Holocaust History

Historians at the Anne Frank House point out that the Netherlands had the highest rate of collaboration with the Nazis of any Western European country, and 85 percent of the pre-war Jewish population was deported to death camps. They add that in the immediate post-war years the Government took a paternalist approach to the returning Jewish community. While there was an imposed taboo on any open form of anti-Semitism, Holocaust survivors were expected to “know their place” and were not accorded any “special treatment.”

The Anne Frank House today encompasses several buildings. While maintaining the original hiding place of Anne and her family, it also offers facilities for learning and educational development. However, educators note that the history of the World War II period is now less visible and seemingly less important, which, some point out, also contributes to Jewish insecurity. There is a particular challenge in teaching the history of

the Holocaust to Muslim students. Jewish community representatives maintain that twenty percent of Dutch teachers are afraid to do so because their Moroccan students will react aggressively. Meanwhile, the Anne Frank House is now focusing more of its efforts in developing teaching materials that will address the problems of intolerance and discrimination more generally.

Debate over the Jewish Future in the Netherlands

The recent publication of a book by an Israeli author of Dutch origin has generated significant debate within the Jewish community and also more widely. In particular, the author quoted a venerable Dutch political leader as saying that young, physically identifiable (i.e., Orthodox) Jews ought to see their future elsewhere, in Israel or the United States. This was a reflection on the growth of the Moroccan community and the belief that elements of this community have made it difficult for Orthodox Jews to walk unmolested through Amsterdam and other major cities.

This is a controversial assessment even among Dutch Jewry. Although it was repeated by one Orthodox rabbi who encourages young men to wear caps over their *kippot* when they are out in public, there are other Jewish leaders who take issue with it. One liberal rabbi, but bearded and wearing a *kippah*, reports that he is met with “pleasantness” on his walks through the same disputed neighborhoods in Amsterdam. Another (Orthodox) rabbi went about the city accompanied by television cameras seeking to film anticipated altercations, but in eight hours of filming only one or two negative experiences occurred. It is hard to consider such anecdotal evidence—whatever it confirms—to be authoritative. But the fact that it has generated such attention and discussion itself reflects the seriousness of the debate.

Jewish community leaders maintain that the number of Jews who emigrate from the Netherlands (primarily to Israel) is only about 60-70 per year, generally less than in neighboring countries. They say that the current estimated Jewish population of 52,000 includes a significant increase over previous estimates, due primarily to immigration from Israel. The Liberal Jewish Congregation of Amsterdam recently opened a new synagogue and community center with much fanfare and the participation of national political leaders.

In much of Western Europe anti-Israel animus in public discourse has been a growing cause for concern and can itself constitute a form of anti-Semitism. This has been taken up by the community’s Center for Information and Documentation on Israel (CIDI), which is troubled by the erosion of Dutch popular support for the Jewish state even as the Government’s relationship with Israel is largely positive. Left wing elements within the Dutch Jewish community have argued for a more openly critical view of Israeli policies believing that unwavering support can itself generate an anti-Jewish backlash. A number of observers maintain that the media focuses too much on the extremes while giving less attention to the majority view of Dutch Jews who have generally warm

feelings toward Israel and who see their future, despite some difficulties, still rooted in Dutch soil.

At the same time they share some of the anxieties that are reflected in the larger population which is skeptical about the country's ability to integrate a new wave of primarily Muslim immigrants and troubled by the xenophobic backlash. The multi-cultural view of Dutch society seems dead—some say it was always more a policy of “indifference”—and it is not clear yet what will replace it. A few people quoted the words of the late Liberal Party leader Hans Dijkstal who said, “Something sinister is creeping into our society.”

Efforts to Promote Jewish-Muslim Understanding

The most visible source of tension for Jews in the Netherlands today appears to be in its uneasy relationship with the country's Muslim population—a population that is estimated by the Central Bureau for Statistics to include 356,000 Moroccans, 389,000 Turks and smaller numbers of immigrants from other countries. Former Amsterdam Mayor Job Cohen sought to foster open discussion which in turn led to the creation of a Jewish-Moroccan network. Meetings with the current co-chairpersons of this network presented two engaging and committed individuals who are seeking to find middle ground. Both must contend with skeptical elements in their respective communities and confront heated debate about the Middle East conflict that threatens to derail progress on local initiatives.

There have been several well-publicized, symbolic initiatives to promote understanding, including a “tolerance walk” undertaken by interreligious leaders through Amsterdam neighborhoods and a “human chain” of several hundred people that linked synagogue to church to mosque.

One innovative, educational initiative—part of a larger, national Diversity Project—identifies young Jewish and Muslim teachers who are sent in tandem to offer special sessions on the history of the Holocaust and the Middle East conflict to vocational high school students, who are likely to include a relatively high percentage from Moroccan background. Observing one such class, I was impressed by the easy rapport between the young Jewish and young Moroccan teacher which is an important part of their lesson plan. Although some representatives of CIDI have criticized the linking of the two subjects, the cooperative approach of the peer teachers surely offers a positive role model that may help open the students to the topics.

Recommendations

The Director of the Anne Frank Foundation pointed out that because of the tragic history of Dutch Jewry, “there is no natural trust in what the Government is doing” and

therefore “confidence building measures” are needed. Jewish community leaders detect a political correctness that intentionally ignores their special circumstances. They see it in the official annual May 4th commemorations marking the end of World War II in which all victims—soldiers, civilians, and Jews murdered in the Holocaust—are treated equally. They claim it is present in current policy which makes no distinction between racism and anti-Semitism. Although the Parliamentary debate on anti-Semitism which took place at the time of my visit reflected these special concerns, they are not equally embraced by the Government, and they should be. At the very least, “confidence building measures” could include sensitivity to the adverse impact of legislation on ritual slaughter and to the genuine financial burden that real security concerns place on a small Jewish community.

- The Government coalition should oppose legislation that would prohibit Jewish ritual slaughter.
- As Parliament has called for a dialogue between the Government and the Jewish Community on security needs, the Government should find ways to assist the Jewish community and lessen this financial burden.
- Other countries have also dealt with the problems of hate speech at football matches. Effective methods have usually involved stopping the game or penalizing the team whose fans initiate the outbursts. Dutch authorities should take similar measures in order to put an end to the anti-Semitic rhetoric that infuses Dutch football games.
- OSCE Participating States, including the Netherlands, have voiced their commitment to monitoring and collecting data on hate crimes including those of an anti-Semitic nature. Dutch authorities should adopt hate crime legislation and collect hate crime data (currently hate crime is addressed under the heading of discrimination) in order to foster a comprehensive and robust response to hate-motivated crimes and incidents targeting Jewish communities.
- The Government should insure that continued funding is provided to the centers which gather complaints of hate on the Internet and of anti-Semitic incidents in Amsterdam and other municipalities. They should support efforts to encourage people to report these incidents.
- Police department forms which provide for the recording of hate crimes should be amended to include a separate designation for anti-Semitic incidents. The working definition of anti-Semitism prepared by the EUMC in 2005 could be adopted for this purpose.

- Educational efforts—including innovative approaches—that are designed to teach special student populations about the Holocaust and also to combat anti-Semitism should be encouraged.

Agenda of Meetings

March 13, 2011

Amsterdam

Informal dinner hosted by Suzette Bronkhorst and Ron Eisens with Rabbi Lodi van de Kamp, Co-chair, Jewish-Moroccan Network
 Dr. Evelien Gans, Professor, Modern Jewish History
 Hadassa Hirschfeld, InterCultural Alliance
 Emile Kuijt, Center for International Legal Studies
 Alon de Lieme, European Jewish Students

March 14, 2011

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague

Mr. Lionel Veer, Human Rights Ambassador
 Ms. Bea ten Tusscher, director Human Rights Department

Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp, President
 Jacob Soetendorp Institute for Human Values

Mr. Ronald Eissens, Director Magenta Foundation and Mr. Daniel Veenboer, Director Meldpunt Discriminatie Internet (Complaints Office Discrimination Internet)

Interview conducted by Mr. Wilfred van de Poll, *Trouw*

Mr. Piet-Hein Donner, Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Affairs

Tuesday, March 15, 2011

Amsterdam

Mr. Jaap Hamburger and Mr. Raymond Nethe,
 Stichting Een Ander Joods Geluid (Foundation 'A different Jewish voice')

Rabbi Raphael Evers, Organization of Dutch Jewish Communities

Ms. Esther Voet, Editor in Chief of Nieuw Israelietisch Weekblad

Mr. Ronald Leopold, Director of Anne Frank Foundation and Mr. Norbert Hinterleitner

Visit to the Anne Frank House

Meeting on projects with staff of Anne Frank Foundation

Ms. Jessica Silversmith,
Meldpunt Discriminatie Amsterdam (Complaints Office Discrimination Amsterdam)

Meeting with Mr. Willem Koster, Mr. David Cohen Paraira and Mr. Ruben Vis, Centraal Joods Overleg (Jewish Consultation Organization)

Mr. Ronny Naftaniel and Ms. Elise Friedman, Centrum Informatie en Documentatie Israël (CIDI, Center for Information and Documentation Israel)

Dinner/Meeting hosted by Mr. Lionel Veer, Human Rights Ambassador of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with

Mr. Jacques Grishaver, Netherlands Auschwitz Committee

Rabbi Menno ten Brink, Liberale Joodse Gemeente (Liberal Jewish Community)

Wednesday, March 16, 2011

Amsterdam

Ms. Karima Belhaj, Joods-Marokkaans Netwerk Amsterdam (Jewish-Moroccan Network)

Haarlem

Visit to project 'de Tweede Wereldoorlog in perspectief' (perspective to World War II) by Diversion. Educational project on WWII and the Middle East conflict. Session with students (level: intermediate vocational education), teachers and peer-educators on the topic.

The Hague

Luncheon hosted by H.E. Vaidotas Verba, ambassador of Lithuania

Mr. Uri Rosenthal, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Session Organized with Parliamentarians:

Mr. Arjan El Fassed, MP (Green Left)

Ms. Cora van Nieuwenhuizen, MP (VVD - People's Party for Freedom and Democracy)

Mr. Kees van der Staaij, MP (SGP - Reformed Political Party)

Ms. Mirjam Sterk, MP (CDA)

Secretariat: Mr. Mark van der Leeden, Mr. Frank Hendrickx

Thursday, March 17, 2011

Mr. Frits Bolkestein