

CEJI's departure from the ENAR network

Brussels, Belgium – 10 September 2024

For 25 years, ENAR has committed to combating racism, discrimination, and upholding human rights as the cornerstone of our advocacy work. The foundation of our organisation stands on the pillars of fostering dialogue, inclusivity, and solidarity among diverse communities across Europe and beyond. The strength of our Network has always stood in the diversity of its members standing behind a common commitment to justice and equality for all.

Since the Hamas attack on October 7th, which led to the death of about 1200 Israelis with an additional 253 taken into captivity in Gaza, the subsequent disproportional response by Israeli forces in Gaza has led to about 39,000 deaths according to the Gaza health ministry. This figure may rise to 186000 according to findings in a [study published by the Lancet](#). The ICJ on January 26, March 28, and May 24, 2024 has effectively ordered through its provisional measures that the ongoing Israeli war on Gaza risk irreparable harm to Palestinians to be protected from genocide, for Israel to halt its latest offensive into Rafah, to ensure unimpeded access to aid into the Gaza strip, to allow for UN organs to investigate allegations of genocide, and for the release of all hostages. At the same time, the United Nations General Assembly had voted calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and to end the suffering of innocent civilians in Gaza. Many Middle East experts, including UN officials have also raised concerns about the plausibility of genocide in Gaza. Meanwhile, the ICC prosecutor Karim Khan has requested for arrest warrants against Hamas and Israeli leaders.

In light of these developments and given the impact on Muslim and Jewish communities in Europe, as well as the wider civil society body, ENAR, conforming to our mandate has adopted a position consistent with European and international law, respect for human rights, and European values of peace and justice. Our aim remains to ensure that the rights and liberties of racialised communities as well as ethnic and religious minorities are respected in Europe. We also strive to promote co-existence within these communities.

This mission becomes more apparent with the rise of Islamophobia and antisemitism in Europe following October 7, as those who oppose our work seek to create divisions within ENAR and the antiracist movement. Yet, we remain steadfast in our work to bridge racialised and minoritised communities in Europe, while at the same time condemning racism and racialised violence in Europe. Under certain circumstances as is the case following October 7, global phenomena which have an impact on communities in Europe warrant that ENAR takes a position - as explained above. This is not the first time ENAR has done so in recent memory. Following the murder of George Floyd in the US, ENAR's [updated programme](#) reflected our concerns with the effect of this racialised murder on black communities in Europe. We also released a press statement condemning [racial profiling in Europe](#). As such, our press statement in October 2023 condemning "Europe's dehumanising reactions to the Israel-Palestine brutality and calls for peace and justice for all", was not out of the ordinary. Rather it reflected our concerns on the scale of violence, loss of human life and increase in hate crimes and speech

toward Muslim and Jewish communities in Europe. Unfortunately, the concerns raised are ever still present today.

Not everyone agreed with our position, including a small community within our network. As an organisation that prides itself with the plurality of voices within our network, we welcome disagreement. We understand that we may not always see in the same way, but we also emphasise the need for honest dialogue as a means of resolving our disagreements. Unfortunately, this is not always the case, and on the 25th March, we received an email from CEJI – A Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe, announcing their resignation from our anti-racist Network.

Although a member leaving is an internal matter, we were surprised by CEJI's choice to include in this email, European Commission's anti-discrimination Coordinators. While we cannot say for sure what CEJI's intentions were, it is not farfetched to interpret this as an attempt to delegitimise the ENAR network. We have nonetheless attempted to resolve this situation through dialogue. At a crucial time where the threat of the far-right looms ever closer, our common cause towards justice and equality should be more important than the differences that separate us. Seeking to continue building bridges while acknowledging our differences, we hoped to resolve any disputes amicably.

Despite our attempts, CEJI decided to announce their resignation on their website, and actively shared their letter to organisations within and outside of ENAR's network. This decision leaves us with little choice but to respond.

ENAR refutes all claims issued within CEJI's letter. While we understand that our way of doing things may not be acceptable to some, we firmly believe that accepting plurality and welcoming differences in a healthy manner is essential for fostering a society which prioritises justice and safety. We also recognise that when disagreements arise, our response cannot be to defame or make unfounded allegations, which lack mutual respect and truth.

We find the allegations made by CEJI serious, displeasing, false and disrespectful. We have consistently provided space to CEJI and other members of our network to engage with us and our processes. We have been forthright, honest, thoughtful, and empathetic when unfair and defamatory allegations are made against the ENAR network, even when we could have chosen to act differently to defend our image, our staff, and our members.

CEJI's letter mentions a specific example about the first EU anti-racism summit in 2021 which we would like to address here:

ENAR, along with 40 other civil society organisations, did indeed threaten to boycott the landmark event when Moshe Kantor, then president of the European Jewish Congress (EJC), was invited as a keynote speaker. This was due to Mr. Kantor's documented history in spreading racist, hateful [rhetoric against Muslims](#). Our initiative was intended to protect the legitimacy of such an event and ensure that members would be in a safe space.

Instead of supporting our Network's collective decision to publish a letter denouncing Mr. Kantor's appearance, CEJI exerted pressure on ENAR not to by threatening to leave our Network. To find a way forward together, our former Director held conversations with CEJI's Director. During the exchanges, it was made clear to us that although CEJI admitted to agreeing with the letter's content, they could not support it publicly for their own reasons.

Ultimately, ENAR attended the Summit where we voiced our criticism to the European Commission and EJC, who spoke at the event. As a result, we are surprised that CEJI finds

how we handled this matter disagreeable when ENAR adopted their position and participated at a high capacity in the event.

In the additional examples listed in CEJI's letter, the incidents described all seemed to have been addressed based on CEJI's own recounting, clearly showing ENAR's historical approach of listening to its members and responding to issues as they arise.

We want to highlight that during Anti-Racism and Diversity week, a representative from CEJI expressed feeling unsafe due to the conversations around Israel and Palestine, along with participants wearing keffiyehs and expressing solidarity with Palestinians. First, the keffiyeh is internationally recognised as a symbol of solidarity with the plight of Palestinians and is worn by advocates for justice globally. Secondly, during a debate on shrinking civic space in Europe, ENAR staff members raised concerns around increasing restrictions and attacks against anti-racist organisations in Europe. Within that context, the link between restrictions on freedom of assembly following October 7th were highlighted. These restrictions are well documented by organisations including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

While we acknowledge these conversations are difficult and uncomfortable, we take this opportunity to remind that ENAR repeatedly spoke against human rights and international law violations committed by both sides, including Hamas. ENAR regrets the fact that a member of CEJI felt uncomfortable during this year's Anti-Racism and Diversity Week. Yet, we ask whether feeling uncomfortable is the same as feeling unsafe.

Our members across Europe are attacked daily for being who they are and for the work they do. Just earlier this year, our Cyprus member [KISA suffered a bomb attack](#) for their work on migration. Countless of our member organisations are continuously being targeted, enduring smear campaigns, and facing threats to their lives. This exposure to violence is a daily reality, so we take our members' safety extremely seriously. That's why our members come to ENAR: to find a space where they can safely express their experiences and find solidarity.

We fully support CEJI in its mission to defend human rights and justice - but the burden we carry in this cause is that we cannot avoid these values when they are no longer convenient to us. CEJI cannot claim to be an ally of all racialised communities while actively undermining safe spaces by preventing lived experiences or traumas from being shared due to some feeling uncomfortable.

Life is rarely, if ever, binary. It is our responsibility to refuse the false binary that pits communities against one another. We can stand in solidarity with Jewish people and fiercely fight against antisemitism while denouncing war crimes and crimes against humanity, irrespective of who the perpetrator is. One can also be Jewish and stand against genocide. One does not automatically negate the other. We see this every day, at every single pro-peace demonstration. We see it within our existing Jewish member organisations, and we see it in new potential members.

The war on Gaza is uncomfortable because it forces all of us to move beyond our individual identities and traumas, and to look inward at our shared humanity. In the face of such tragedies, we must be brave enough to take a stand for what is right.

Let us be unequivocally clear: ENAR stands against all forms of racism, discrimination, and violence, regardless of the identity or background of those involved. Human rights are universal and indivisible, and our advocacy is guided by a commitment to justice and equality for all.

As we move forward, let us reaffirm our shared commitment to combating racism and discrimination in all its forms and standing in solidarity with marginalised communities in Europe

and around the world. In the face of what the ICJ is referring to as a risk of irreparable harm to Palestinians to be protected from genocide, we must be brave and remember that “Never Again” means “Never Again For All”.

ENAR Chair of the Board
Nyanchama Okemwa

ENAR Executive Director
Kim Smouter