

Centre for Information and Documentation on Israel: Report of Anti-Semitic Incidents in the Netherlands for 2002 and January-May 2003

(English Summary)

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On 13 June, 2003 the Centre for Information and Documentation on Israel submitted its annual report of anti-Semitic incidents in the Netherlands to the minister of the Interior and the chairman of the Lower House Commission of the Interior. The 62-page report describes the incidents reported to the CIDI in 2002 and anti-Semitic occurrences registered in the first four months in 2003. It is subdivided into reports that concern the following categories:

- physical violence
- threat of violence
- slurs
- destruction of synagogues / cemeteries
- graffiti on synagogues
- graffiti on Jewish cemeteries
- graffiti on monuments
- sports
- e-mails
- letters / pamphlets / faxes / stickers
- miscellaneous (media, books, music)

A separate chapter covers the number of lawsuits concerning anti-Semitism. Various articles in Dutch penal law prohibit deliberately insulting Jews in public and inciting hostility toward them.

The new report concludes that the number of anti-Semitic incidents rose sharply in 2002. The number registered was up by 140% to 337. The increase was particularly pronounced among e-mails disseminating hatred. The number of serious incidents (physical violence, threats of violence and slurs) also grew, from 62 in 2001 to 99 in 2002. This worrisome trend started in 1999. Note that CIDI counts regular slurs directed at a single individual or institution as one report and has disregarded Internet sites and chat boxes. The Meldpunt Discriminatie Internet [hotline for reporting Internet discrimination] (MDI) records such occurrences.

The report for 2002 and the first four months of 2003 is based on reports received by CIDI, the anti-discrimination bureaus in the Netherlands (ADB's), the Meldpunt Discriminatie Internet and the anti-fascist research group Kafka. This year the police for the Amsterdam-Amstelland region supplied anonymized data as well. The report also reflects data from the Commissie Gelijke Behandeling [Commission for equal treatment], the fifth monitor report on Racism and the Extreme Right by the Anne Frank Foundation and the University of Leiden, the Centraal Meldpunt Voetbalvandalisme [football hooliganism reporting centre], the KNVB [royal Dutch football league] and the Landelijk Expertise Centrum van Discriminatiezaken [national expertise centre for discrimination cases] (LECD).

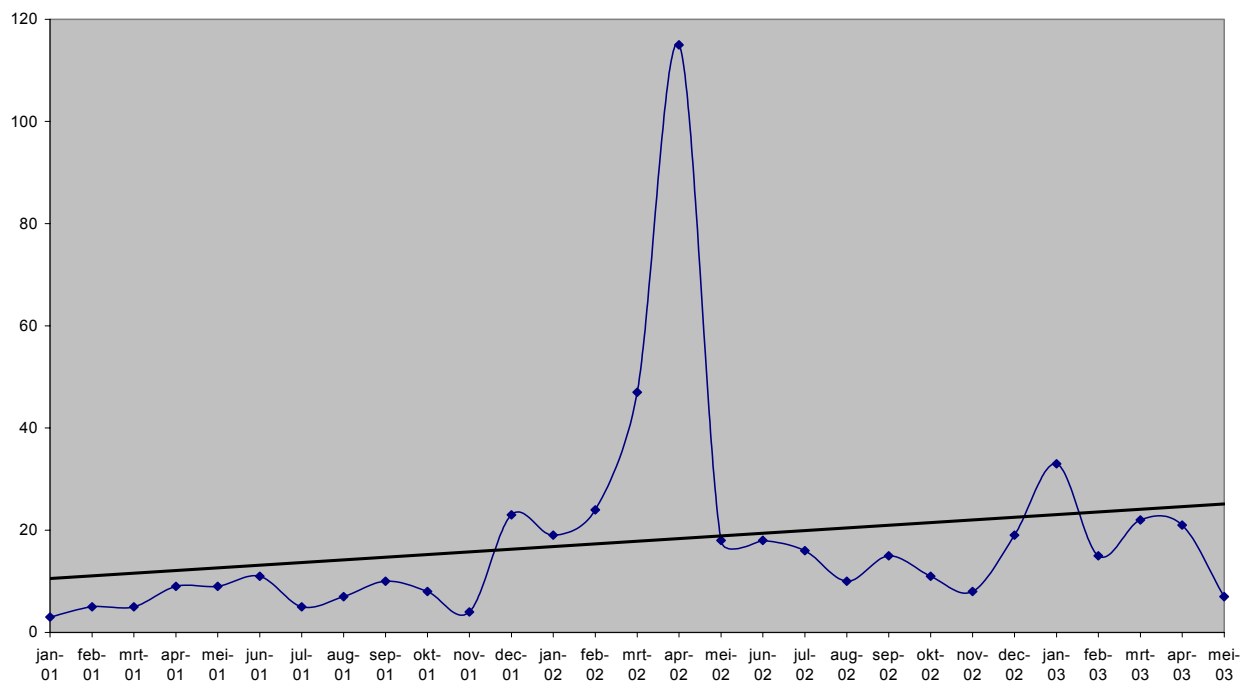
CIDI elicited information for 2001 from several individuals identifiable as Jews because of the widespread stories about regular slurs.¹ To compare the periods, the same individuals were questioned again this year. This serves to verify the reports we receive and to determine the resulting impression about the state of anti-Semitism in the Netherlands.

All CIDI reports previously published about anti-Semitism in the Netherlands note that registering such incidents is a complex procedure. Mere numbers are not sufficiently meaningful. Is an anonymous phone call to a Jewish institution more serious than groups chanting anti-Semitic slurs, and is this in turn – since there are several perpetrators – more serious than an incident where two Jewish men in Amersfoort were verbally abused by ‘only’ two youths of North-African descent. How does this compare to a schoolchild who has suffered so much anti-Semitic taunting from fellow students that he lacks the courage to attend school anymore? Question may also arise as to whether somebody received truly anti-Semitic treatment in an argument, or whether the victim is interpreting the argument as anti-Semitic. Differences in interpretation are also the reason why not all incidents reported to or registered with other organizations appear in the CIDI report. These differences are particularly complicated where anti-Israel remarks are concerned. Given the virulent anti-Israel sentiment among certain groups in Dutch society, such as within the Arab European League, which has operated in the Netherlands since the end of 2002 and has its main office in Antwerp, and the action committee Stop de Bezetting [Stop the occupation] (which opposes the Israeli policy toward the Palestinians), and considering the many discussions about the relationship between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, we need to explore what makes a statement against Israel anti-Semitic as well. Utterances purely directed against Israel, however virulent they may be, are **not** included on the CIDI list of anti-Semitic remarks. While a slur such as ‘Sharon is a murderer’ may be offensive to a head of state, it is not an anti-Semitic utterance and therefore does not appear in our report. ‘Adolf Sharon is a murderer’ is included, since it equates the actions of the Israeli prime minister with what the Nazis did to the Jews.

The incidents mentioned in our report are primarily indicative of the number of anti-Semitic incidents disclosed. Although our annual report is acknowledged as an indication of the state of anti-Semitism in the Netherlands, these data are not an exhaustive list of such occurrences. People often do not express racist ideas, and sometimes the spirits of victims of anti-Semitic incidents are so broken that they cease to report them.

A breakdown of the figures

The rise in anti-Semitic incidents during 2002 is noted above. The table below shows this clearly. The months January-May 2003 reflect fewer incidents with respect to the same period the year before.



Disregarding the non-recurring sharp peak (because of the situation in the Middle East) in March and April 2002, expressions of anti-Semitism are still up with respect to the previous year. This is depicted in the trend line in the figure below.

The trend of anti-Semitic incidents in January 2001 – 5 May 2003.

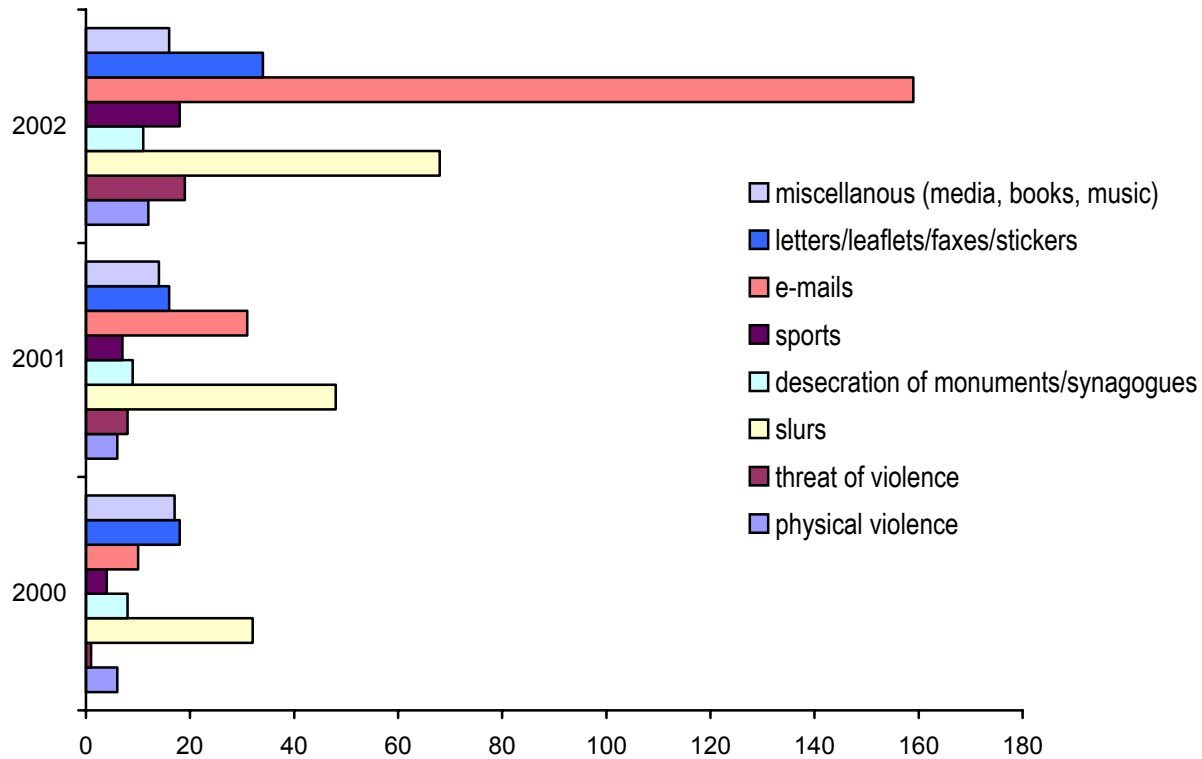
The figures for the different occurrences of anti-Semitism are as follows:

	2000	2001	2002	2002 until 5 May	2003 until 5 May
physical violence	6	6	12	8	1
threats of violence	1	8	19	9	2
slurs	32	48	68	40	21
destruction of synagogues/cemeteries	0	2	2	2	1
graffiti on synagogues	6	0	3	1	0
graffiti on Jewish cemeteries	2	3	1	0	0
graffiti on monuments	0	4	5	4	3
sports	4	7	18	6	4
e-mails	10	31	159	110	54
letters/leaflets/faxes/stickers	18	16	34	28	2
miscellaneous (media, books, music)	17	14	16	3	11

The chart on the previous page is to be considered in light of the following aspects:

- The number of verbal abuse incidents for 2002 and 2003 include regular incidents, for which the frequency of occurrence is impossible to determine accurately. They include reports of Jews who suffer regular verbal abuse, torrents of verbal abuse at synagogues or regular verbal abuse directed against a Jewish child at a playground. These reports are each counted as a single incident.
- Of the 158 e-mails in 2002, 108 were addressed to CIDI, including 55 in April. They include multiple e-mails from the same authors.
- These statistics do not reflect the increase that occurred on the Internet. The MDI has reported a rise from 197 to 584.
- Graffiti on public (non-Jewish) sites has been omitted as well, as their degree of severity (from mischievous to offensive) varies too much.

The bar chart below concerns the years 2000-2002. As was noted in the introduction, the figures are not comprehensive. In their monitor report for 2001 referring to British research, the investigators Van Donselaar and Rodrigues, even suggested that the figures might need to be quadrupled to be realistic. After all, many incidents go unreported. There are several possible reasons for not reporting an incident: either people do not consider such action worthwhile, or they believe that filing a report would be pointless, since the police are rarely in a position to trace the perpetrators and in some cases even refuse to record the incident. Victims may even have become so broken-hearted by their intolerant surroundings that they feel a report would be a waste of time.



Anti-Semitic incidents in the Netherlands, listed by category for the years 2000-2002

Comparisons

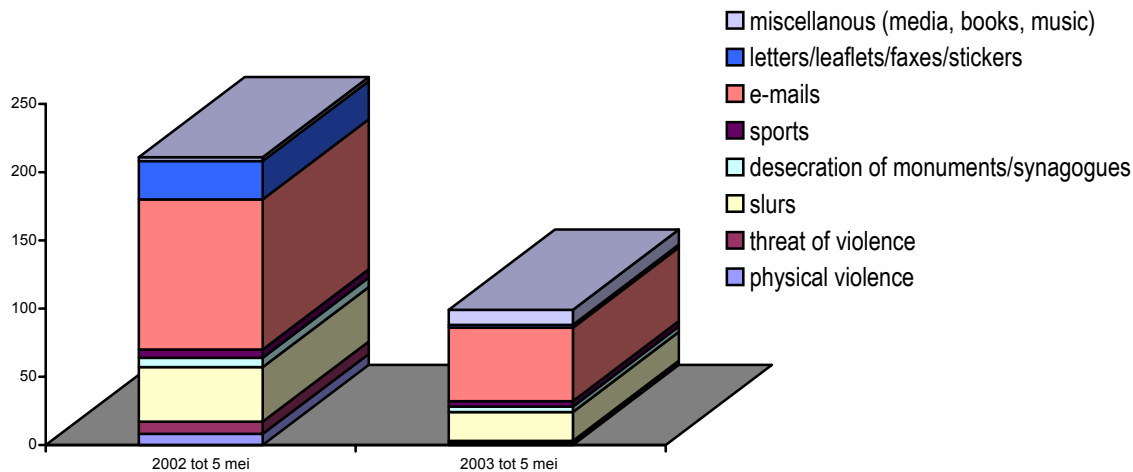
Last year CIDI observed a progressive worsening of anti-Semitism, especially since manifestations were emerging in every sector of society: at work, at school, in sports, on the Internet, in e-mails. The situation persisted throughout 2002.

The figures for 2002 reflect a remarkable rise in the number of incidents involving violence or the threat of violence, as well as the number of incidents of verbal abuse with respect to 2001: from 62 to 99, respectively; a total increase of 60 percent. These data are particularly threatening to those identifiable as Jews, as these people are victimized by such treatment in increasing measure. The perpetrators are often North-African youths. The rise in the number of incidents at schools is similarly disconcerting: in 2001 there were four, in 2002 there were six, and during the first few months of 2003, seven such reports were received. School should be a place where anti-Semitism and other forms of racism are not tolerated.

Last May CIDI wrote that the rise in 2002 was attributable to the coarsened society (the number of incidents against Muslims has increased in recent years as well) and especially to the surge in violence between Israel and the Palestinians in March/April 2002. This increase in manifestations of anti-Jewish sentiment is clearly related to the violence in the Middle East, as apparent from the exceptional rise in March/April 2002. Operation Defensive Shield in those months was in progress at the time, and Palestinians and the media regularly suggested that the struggle in the Palestinian refugee camp was comparable to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In fact, 55 Palestinians and 22 Israelis were killed. Although the fighting between Israel and the Palestinians continued 'as usual' during the period January – early May 2003, this reduced interest in this violence because of the war against Iraq led to a decline in the number of anti-Semitic incidents compared with the same period the year before. The rising trend from the past returned. The extent to which this trend will continue is impossible to predict at this time.

Presumably, this reduced attention to Israel in recent months is not the only cause of the decline in actual manifestations of anti-Semitism in January-May 2003. Another phenomenon is materializing.

Comparison of the number of anti-Semitic incidents between the period 1 January – 5 May 2002 and the period 1 January – 5 May 2003



Anti-Zionism, anti-Semitism

Most – but by no means – all incidents of verbal abuse are perpetrated by youths of North African descent. CIDI has observed this pattern since 2000. These youths tend to exhibit a strong sense of solidarity with the Palestinians and are encouraged by Arab TV stations that export the religious-anti-Semitic prejudices prevailing throughout the Arab world to Europe via satellite. Some second and third-generation Arab youths are poorly integrated in Dutch society. They do not distinguish between Jews and Israel. They express their abhorrence of Israeli politics through anti-Semitic utterances directed against Jews. World War II occurred in the distant past in their view and means nothing to them. The five disturbances of the national commemoration of the victims of World War II recorded in Amsterdam on 4 May 2003 clearly demonstrated this. Some even abused World War II as an opportunity to incite.

But a relatively small group of Arab youths is not the only problem. Society is becoming progressively less able to discuss Israel without sharing prejudices about Jews. Gretta Duisenberg, the chairwoman of the Comité Stop de Bezetting [Committee Against the Occupation] and wife of the President of the European Central Bank, has compared Israeli politics with the Nazi atrocities. She ‘qualified’ her statement by adding ‘except for the Holocaust’. While this remark may not be purely anti-Semitic in legal terms, such statements offend Jews. The same holds true for her remark about the power of the Jewish lobby to which she attributes Israel’s political success and her intention to collect six million signatures. On 23 December 2002 the Dutch Public Prosecutor stated that her remark about collecting signatures contributed to ‘poisoning the ambience of political debate in the Netherlands.’ Mrs. Duisenberg regularly treads a fine line between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. In the process, she resorts to anti-Jewish statements to vent her frustration about the situation of the Palestinians. This is a longstanding practice. Jews have been blamed for all kinds of wrongdoings since the Middle Ages. She and many like her are apparently unable to distinguish between Jews and Israeli politics.

Admittedly, the distinction between anti-Semitism and criticism of Israel is a very fine one. Let us repeat: criticism of Israel as a state, its policy or the human rights situation is not anti-Semitism and is at most a political difference of opinion. In a host of situations, however, such criticism coincides with false

accusations that have no bearing whatsoever on the local situation. Such accusations nearly always concern a negative interpretation of the history and religion of the Jewish people.

In his recent article ‘The new antisemitism, or when is a taboo not a taboo?’, former Professor of Political Science and Modern History Peter Pulzer (Oxford University) signs a test to distinguish anti-Semitism from anti-Israel criticism. The following is a slightly modified version of the test.

Does the individual who made the statement:

- *criticize or attack not only specific individuals or organizations, but also anonymous collectivities, such as ‘the Jewish lobby’, ‘the Jewish community’, or ‘the Jewish vote’?*
- *emphasize or exaggerate the economic status of Jews, involvement of Jews in the media or other allegedly ‘Jewish’ characteristics?*
- *complain that every criticism of Israel is automatically denounced as anti-Semitism?*
- *compare the Israeli government with Nazism and the Israeli army’s actions with the SS, the Holocaust or genocide?*
- *demand boycotts and sanctions exclusively against Israel, without ever having done so for other serious issues worldwide?*

With visual material, the additional question is:

Does the artist or television producer:

- *use the Star of David to identify Israeli military equipment*
- *use a skullcap to identify Israeli politicians?*
- *use swastikas to identify Israelis or Zionists?*
- *portray Israelis or Zionists in the manner of the traditionally caricatured Jew?*

If the answer to one or more of the above questions is yes, the individual who made the statement is approaching the danger zone, and will easily make the transition from anti-Israel conduct to anti-Semitism. This happened at the anti-Israel demonstration in Amsterdam on 13 April 2002. Some of the ca. 15,000 demonstrators compared Sharon to Hitler and equated the Star of David with swastikas. Such expressions are totally unrelated to the regular protest against Israel and are therefore included in CIDI’s report. When the distinctions become blurred, CIDI is more cautious and does not include them in the report.

The shift from purely anti-Jewish to anti-Israel may be one of the reasons why the number of anti-Semitic incidents decreased during the first four months of 2003. Moreover, both Muslims and Jews have reached out to each other to improve their dialogue since the previous report. This course may also have reduced the number of incidents with respect to the same period in 2002. That would be a change for the better.

A Jewish world conspiracy

The Internet is teeming with people who believe that Jews are conspiring to control the world population. This accusation has become deeply rooted in the Arab states, where the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is a popular theme in television series. This defamatory pamphlet from the tsarist era presumes a Jewish world conspiracy. In the early twentieth century, it led to bloody pogroms in the Ukraine and Russia. Its present vigour in the Arab media was also apparent from the responses to the war against Iraq. There were

widespread accusations that the U.S. action against Saddam Hussein was engineered by the Jewish lobby. These unfortunate sentiments have now surfaced almost unnoticed in Dutch political discourse. Examples include the aforementioned blunders by Gretta Duisenberg, as well as the article about the movie director Paul Verhoeven in *Veronica Magazine*, the – withdrawn – statement by programme producer Adam Curry on the radio programme *Met het oog op morgen* and, last but not least, the book by Peter Edel with a preface by Karel Glastra van Loon (a writer and an advisor to the Socialistische Partij). Such inadvertent public remarks about the Jewish world conspiracy in respected papers or radio programmes or unopposed publication of an anti-Semitic column in a widely read newspaper is cause for concern. The Netherlands is not exceptional in this respect.

Comparison

Juliane Wetzel, employed at the Centre for Anti-Semitism Research in Berlin, reports that the Jewish conspiracy theory is the most prevalent form of contemporary anti-Semitism in Europe among the right and left wing alike. At a recent demonstration in Germany, anti-globalists displayed a sign featuring Uncle Sam with a Jewish bent nose. The globe was suspended from his finger by a silk thread: Jews call the shots in the world, even the ones by the Americans... A study by the Forum for Countering Antisemitism confirms this impression. This institute has observed rising hatred against both Israel and the Jews in many countries, in with both groups being held responsible for all the evil in the world. The Forum has followed this trend and has noted that Islamic organizations, the ultra right and the far left have joined forces in blaming the Jews for everything they feel is wrong with our society. In the Netherlands the neo-Nazi Weerwolf movement led by Eite Homan illustrates this practice. Homan proliferates by the ultra right-wing hatred of the Jews via an American website while encouraging the Palestinian struggle against Israel.

The Stephen Roth Institute of Tel Aviv University, which is dedicated to research on worldwide anti-Semitism and receives support from CIDI, reports a drastic rise in the number of incidents over the course of 2002. The researchers find the shift of anti-Semitic activities from totalitarian states to Western democracies particularly alarming. Around the world in 2002, there were 311 very serious aggressive incidents against Jews outside Israel, involving weapons in 56 cases. The increase in aggression is especially pronounced in France, Belgium and Britain. The number of incidents is also higher in the United States and Russia. In Eastern Europe and Latin America, the number has not changed with respect to last year. In Belgium and France, synagogues were burned and Jews stabbed. In this context, the incidents in the Netherlands thus far are not that serious.

Recommendations

These acts of violence and the smouldering anti-Semitism (*de Volkskrant*, 3 April 2003) in Europe necessitate coordinated and specific measures against the rising anti-Semitism. Possible measures might include consistent and clear condemnation of anti-Semitism by governments and local authorities alike. Anti-racist legislation needs to be implemented properly and funding allocated toward educational projects. All appeals to sympathize with anti-Semitic individuals or organizations are to be rejected, since accommodating them will merely fortify those organizations and will elicit a socially undesirable backlash. There should also be more dialogue among the populations groups (Jews and Muslims) that would like to be on good terms with each other.

Proper legislation is one of the chief instruments in the fight against anti-Semitism. Such laws are useless, however, if they are not enforced. In recent years CIDI has issued regular public warnings that Dutch courts were taking far too long to settle legal cases, if they made it to trial at all. This is socially irresponsible, even with all due respect for the overburdened legal system. Experiences have also demonstrated that the lack of an adequate international agreement to eliminate anti-Semitism and racism on the Internet will probably instigate a procedure similar to the one observed with the groups hurling anti-Semitic chants at football stadiums. Years ago, Dutch governments still believed that these chants

would remain within the stadiums. They were not prohibited. But how do you make clear that what is allowed within the stadium is prohibited outside the sports arena? The same thing might happen with Internet. How can society maintain that statements that are permissible on the Internet are not allowed in the real world? The time has come for a global agreement on the subject.

Racist and anti-Semitic websites, for example, can be eliminated effectively only once no more countries like the United States allow freedom of expression to prevail over the struggle to end discrimination. Anti-Semitic conduct from second and third-generation Arab immigrants in Europe becomes impossible to address, when Arab TV stations are allowed to continue inciting hatred against Jews via satellite television.