

NEWS & POLITICS

Amnesty International Sponsors Speaker Who Celebrated 9/11, Denied Holocaust, Vilified Gays and Jews

The sponsorship of activist Dyab Abou Jahjah is part of an increasingly disturbing pattern for the erstwhile humanitarian organization

BY YAIR ROSENBERG

DECEMBER 02, 2015

On December 12, Amnesty International is co-sponsoring an anti-Islamophobia rally in Brussels, Belgium. Combating bigotry against minorities—which is particularly prevalent in Europe against Muslims and Jews—is an honorable and pressing endeavor. Unfortunately, one of the keynote speakers at Amnesty’s event seems far more interested in stoking such hatred rather than fighting it.

Dyab Abou Jahjah is one of four individuals scheduled to speak at the rally. He has called the 9/11 attacks “sweet revenge,” said Europe made “the cult of the Holocaust and Jew-worshipping its alternative religion,” and labeled gays “AIDS-spreading faggots.” He has also questioned the existence of the Nazi gas chambers, and is a former fighter for the anti-Semitic group Hezbollah, an officially designated terrorist group by the U.S. and European Union. For his hateful activism, Abou Jahjah has been banned in the United Kingdom since 2009.

ved on its own, Amnesty’s sponsorship of Abou Jahjah would appear to simply be a case of insufficient vetting, the result of negligence rather than

malice. But unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident.

In October, Amnesty drew sharp condemnation for sponsoring a U.S. speaking tour for activist Bassem Tamimi, who was revealed to be posting anti-Semitic material on Facebook. Last April, the organization was criticized after its membership rejected a resolution calling for Amnesty to combat anti-Semitism in Britain. Prior to that, Amnesty's U.K. branch had failed to discipline a senior official who publicly equated Israel with ISIS.

At this point, then, it is worth asking whether the organization—whatever the merits of its other work—is a credible voice on anti-Jewish bigotry in Europe and the Middle East, or if it is becoming part of the problem.

Requests for comment from Amnesty were not returned as of this writing.

UPDATE 12/4, 1:52pm EST: Amnesty International in Belgium offered the following response:

Amnesty International Belgium is one of more than ten organizations sponsoring a debate on Islamophobia to be held in Brussels this December.

This is an important issue that needs to be debated in Belgium at a time when Islamophobia, especially following the horrific attacks in Paris last month, is on the rise.

Amnesty International is sponsoring this event in recognition of the significance of this issue in Belgian society. This is not intended as an endorsement of any of the views of the individual speakers.

It is important to stand up against all forms of discrimination, including Islamophobia, and the only way to understand and engage fully with the issues is to hear voices from people on all sides of the debate.

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Yair Rosenberg is a senior writer at Tablet. Subscribe to his newsletter, listen to his music, and follow him on Twitter and Facebook.

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