Former U.N. Spokesman Harasses Holocaust Museum Over Holocaust Remembrance Day

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A former United Nations spokesman, replying to a five-day-old post about Holocaust Remembrance Day, demanded a Holocaust museum respond to a ten-year-old Israeli comment.

Chris Gunness was the [spokesman](https://www.unrwa.org/tags/chris-gunness) for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

On Monday, Gunness found a Twitter post from Yad Vashem, a museum and center for Holocaust research. The post commemorated Holocaust Remembrance Day, observed last Thursday.

The museum's [full](https://twitter.com/yadvashem/status/1123657479416627201) post, written on Holocaust Remembrance Day, read:

Each year, six Holocaust survivors are chosen to light torches in memory of the six million Jews who were murdered during the #Holocaust. Watch the stories of all 6 torch-lighters chosen for the 2019 Holocaust Remembrance Day State Opening Ceremony here

Gunness took the opportunity to [demand](https://twitter.com/ChrisGunness/status/1125419680796221441) comment on a former Israeli official's comment about a "shoah" against the Palestinians.

Gunness linked to a 2008 story from the *Guardian*about Israel and a Palestinian "holocaust."

In April 2008, following a barrage of Hamas-fired rockets from the Gaza Strip, former Israeli Deputy Defense Minister Matan Vilnai warned of a *shoah* (lit. "catastrophe, holocaust") in response.

"The more Qassam [Hamas rocket] fire intensifies and the rockets reach a longer range, they will bring upon themselves a bigger *shoah* because we will use all our might to defend ourselves," he said on army radio.

The term "shoah" is biblical. It means "catastrophe," with connotations of fire. It is the term Israelis use to refer to the Holocaust. Its Ancient Greek translation, "*holokaustos*," is used in English. The word "Holocaust" became the term for the Nazi-led genocide of Jews and other European populations in World War II.

Following global coverage of Vilnai's remarks, a spokesperson [clarified](https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0%2C7340%2CL-3513195%2C00.html) he meant to use the word in its general sense.

"The minister used the Hebrew term ‘shoah' which means ‘catastrophe' and in this context does not refer to the ‘the Shoah' – the Holocaust," a representative [said](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/feb/29/acatastrophicturnofphrase).

Palestinian leadership frequently [denies](https://www.nytimes.com/1988/06/12/opinion/palestinian-perversion-of-the-holocaust.html?mtrref=www.google.com&gwh=10B2D21D27140A1D05876D87A4E6640A&gwt=pay) the occurrence of the Holocaust. Palestinian officials and their foreign defenders [frequently](https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/6917738/jeremy-corbyn-resignation-calls-anti-semitism-row/) [describe](https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0%2C7340%2CL-3513195%2C00.html) Israeli policy as [Nazi-esque](https://www.adl.org/resources/fact-sheets/response-to-common-inaccuracy-israel-acts-like-nazis) and the current situation as a Holocaust.

A year after the comment in question, for example, the Associated Press [reported](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/32630566/ns/world_news-mideast_n_africa/t/hamas-slams-un-over-holocaust-classes/#.XNLwhJNKjOR) the following:

A Hamas spiritual leader on Monday called teaching Palestinian children about the Nazi murder of 6 million Jews a "war crime," rejecting a suggestion that the U.N. might include the Holocaust in Gaza's school curriculum.

[…]

Many Palestinians are reluctant to acknowledge Jewish suffering, fearing it might diminish their own. Attitudes toward the Holocaust range from outright denial to challenging its scope.

Vilnai [offered](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/feb/29/acatastrophicturnofphrase) his comment, albeit artlessly, in that context.

On Monday, Gunness wrote a separate tweet [accusing](https://twitter.com/ChrisGunness/status/1125746184235225088) Israeli officials of "exploitation of the holocaust [sic] and Nazi-esque behavoir [sic]."

The account Gunness used for his tweets is [listed](https://blogs.un.org/blog/2014/07/30/humanitarian-updates-about-the-emergency-in-gaza/) as his official Twitter page the U.N.'s website.

His agency, UNRWA, is [widely accused](https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10154334049171561) of [anti-Semitism](https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/New-UNRWA-textbooks-display-extreme-anti-Jewish-and-anti-Israel-sentiments-study-shows-506174) and [maintains](https://unwatch.org/whats-wrong-unrwa-must-reformed/) close ties to the terror group Hamas.

A 2015 U.N. report [found](https://unwatch.org/un-admits-palestinians-fired-rockets-unrwa-schools/) "it was highly likely that a Palestinian armed group might have used [UNRWA school] premises to hide weapons."

In 2017, Israel [discovered](https://www.timesofisrael.com/israels-un-envoy-blasts-discovery-of-gaza-tunnel-under-unrwa-school/) Hamas-built tunnels running underneath an UNRWA-run school. Hamas uses the tunnels to rapidly move soldiers, hostages, and weapons out of reach of Israeli forces.

In 2018, President Donald Trump [announced](https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/.premium-trump-administration-announces-end-to-financial-aid-for-unrwa-1.6433942) he would be freezing U.S. federal aid to UNRWA. The U.S. is the agency's [leading](https://freebeacon.com/national-security/congress-seeks-major-downsizing-u-n-palestinian-refugee-agency/) source of revenue.

Gunness has previously addressed UNRWA members making inappropriate comments on social media.

In February 2017, Gunness [released](https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/statement-neutrality) a statement addressing a "number of allegations … made against alleged UNRWA staff members which we are looking into as part of our ongoing commitment to maintaining the Agency’s neutrality."

He promised the agency would "launch specific neutrality and social media training for senior managers across all five UNRWA fields of operations and headquarters."

His comments followed a story in *[Bild](https://www.bild.de/politik/ausland/vereinte-nationen/un-mitarbeiter-verbreiten-judenhass-50078952.bild.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank),*a German news site, about UNRWA-paid staff using Facebook to spread anti-semitism. The story reported that "**teachers are spreading anti-Semitic videos and caricatures, as well as open calls for violence against Jews, with students commenting**" (emphasis in original).

Gunness is himself a [frequent source](https://electronicintifada.net/search/site/CHRIS%20GUNNESS) for fringe anti-Israel news sites.

As of press time, Gunness had offered no apology for his comment or commemoration of Holocaust Remembrance Day.