

## **Responses to Misinformation about Israel**

### **“Israel Is an Apartheid State.”**

Israel, like the United States and Canada, is a democracy, where all of its citizens enjoy the same fundamental democratic freedoms. These include freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom to take part in the political process. Along with Hebrew, Arabic is an official language of Israel. The country’s Arab minority is represented in both the Israeli Knesset and the Supreme Court. Freedom House, a non-partisan human rights organization, co-founded by Eleanor Roosevelt, lists Israel as one of the most open and transparent countries in the world.

Israel also serves as a refuge for other oppressed minorities. The Bahá’í community, religiously persecuted by Iran, has made its center of faith in Israel’s north. Israel is the only country in the Middle East where the Christian population is free to worship and is growing. Hundreds of victims of the horrific genocide in Sudan have walked by foot to live under the blanket of freedom that Israel provides.

In a region primarily comprised of totalitarian often theocratic dictatorships, Israel is a bastion of freedom, pluralism and democracy.

### **“Israel’s Wall Is Illegal and Must Come Down.”**

Israel erected its security fence in response to countless suicide attacks that have maimed and murdered hundreds of innocent Israeli civilians. One such incident occurred on March 27, 2002, when a member of Hamas detonated an explosive device in the Park Hotel, killing 30 civilians celebrating the Jewish holiday of Passover.

Israel is following an historic precedent of other countries that have erected security barriers on disputed land, built to prevent acts of violence. For example, in response to increased terrorist infiltrations coming from Pakistan, India constructed a security fence in the disputed territory of Kashmir. Saudi Arabia, one of the leading ideological and financial supporters of Hamas, has built a security barrier on its disputed border with

Yemen, which aims to “prevent infiltration and smuggling.” Israel, like all other states, has the right, obligation and duty to protect its citizens against foreign aggression and terrorism. Given the historical precedent, criticizing Israel’s quest for peace and security is both unjust and hypocritical.

When true peace is achieved with Israel’s neighbors, its security fence can come down. But, the lives of murdered Israelis can never be brought back.

### **“The Israeli Occupation Is the Root Cause of the Conflict.”**

Israel’s presence in the disputed territories is the result, not the cause, of Arab aggression against the Jewish State. Israel gained control of these territories in the just, defensive war of 1967.

It should be noted, however, that aggression and terrorism against the State of Israel predates the war of 1967. One such incident occurred on March 17, 1954 when an Israeli Egged Bus on its way to Tel Aviv from Éclat was ambushed and 11 passengers were murdered. Terrorism against the Jewish population of Palestine even predates the creation of the State of Israel. On August 23-24, 1929, 67 Jews were murdered in Hebron, and hundreds others were forcefully removed from their homes.

Throughout history, Israel has shown and proven its commitment to peaceful relations with its neighbors. The Jewish leadership in Palestine accepted United Nations Resolution 181, drafted in November 1947, which called for the partition of the remaining parts of the mandate of Palestine into both Jewish and Arab States. Arab leadership did not accept the two-state solution.

After its stunning victory in the Six Day War, the government of Israel offered to give away territory it conquered in exchange for peace with the Arab world. The Arab League, after a meeting in Khartoum, Sudan on September 1, 1967, declared “no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with it.” Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban responded, “I think that this is the first war in history that on the morrow the victors sued for peace and the vanquished called for unconditional surrender.”

In July 2000 at Camp David, and six months later in Tuba, Egypt, Israel offered the Palestinian Authority over 96% control of the West Bank, full control of the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem as their future capital in exchange for a peace treaty. Yasser Arafat rejected the offer, walked away from the negotiating table without proposing a counter-offer, and started the second Intifada.

Israel wants peace; a peace that will benefit both itself and the Palestinian people. Responsible Arab leadership is needed to make this a reality.

## **“Israel Must Allow the Right of Return of Palestinian Refugees.”**

Both Israel and the United States agree that the so-called “right of return” has no basis in international law, is unprecedented, and also serves as a euphemism for the destruction of Israel as a Jewish State.

The Palestinian refugee problem is the result of the Arab world’s rejection of United Nations Resolution 181, which called for the partition of the remaining mandate of Palestine into both Jewish and Arab States. After this resolution was passed and rejected by Arab leaders, many wealthy Palestinian Arabs left the area, sensing impending conflict. On May 14, 1948, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion declared Israel’s independence. He called on “the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to preserve peace and participate in the building of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its provisional and permanent institutions.” One day later, five Arab armies launched a war to crush the infant State of Israel. As a result of this new wave of fighting, more Palestinian Arabs fled their villages on their own accord. Other Palestinian Arabs were pressured by their brethren to leave their villages. Despite pleas by Israeli leaders such as Haifa Mayor Shabtai Levy to stay, many Palestinian Arabs continued to leave.

At the same time, the fate of the Jewish people living under Arab and Islamic rule was dire. On May 16, 1948, the front page on *The New York Times* avowed “Jews in Grave Dangers in All Moslem Lands.” Since 1948, approximately 800,000 to one million Jews have been forced to leave their homes in Arab countries and were made refugees. Many of these Jewish refugees found a new home in the State of Israel. Others dispersed in other countries around the world.

On December 11, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly passed the non-binding Resolution 194, which attempted to find a way to end hostilities in the Arab-Israeli War. While much of the resolution focused on conciliation and the status of Jerusalem, there was reference to “refugees,” both Jewish and Arab. Far from calling for any “right of return,” Resolution 194 recommended that refugees be allowed to return to their homes “at the earliest practical date,” only if they are willing to live in peace with their neighbors. It was also recommended that others be compensated. It should be noted that Arab States Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen actually voted against this resolution.

In 2008, House Resolution 185 was passed in the United States Congress, which noted that all discussions about Middle Eastern refugees “also include a similarly explicit reference to the resolution of the issue of Jewish refugees from Arab countries.” Israel and the United States both realize that a fair settlement to both the Palestinian and Jewish refugee problem can only come through honest peace negotiations.

## **“Zionism Is Racism.”**

Zionism, like other nationalisms, is the national liberation movement of the Jewish people. As Abba Eban, former Israel Foreign Minister, wrote “Zionism is nothing more - but also nothing less - than the Jewish people's sense of origin and destination in the land linked eternally with its name. It is also the instrument whereby the Jewish nation seeks an authentic fulfillment of itself.”

Opposition to Zionism is a euphemism for questioning Israel's right to exist. Denying the Jewish people a right that has been systematically granted to other peoples throughout history – the right of self determination – is inherently racist in itself.

The Jewish people, despite being exiled throughout history, have had a continuous presence in the land of Israel for over 2,500 years. Israel has always been in the heart of the Jewish people; it is a part of its history, culture, ritual and religion. Throughout history, the Jewish people have been victims of racism and institutionalized discrimination in Europe, the Middle East and other parts of the world.

On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion proclaimed Israel independence, creating the only democracy in the Middle East. All Israeli citizens, regardless of race, gender or religion, enjoy the same fundamental democratic freedoms. On March 25, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, “I see Israel as one of the great outposts of democracy in the world, and a marvelous example of what can be done, how desert land can be transformed into an oasis of brotherhood and democracy.”

The State of Israel serves as a refuge for victims of racism, a place where all people can live free of persecution. Its government has also gone to great lengths to rescue Jews in distress. Through Operations Moses, Joshua and Solomon, the State of Israel rescued thousands of Ethiopian Jews. Writing in *The New York Times* on January 7, 1985, William Safire wrote, “For the first time in history, thousands of black people are being brought to a country not in chains but in dignity, not as slaves but as citizens.”

The Zionist movement has helped create a vibrant, multi-cultural democracy. Before his assassination, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was speaking in Cambridge, Massachusetts. After being confronted by a hostile student in the crowd, he stated, “When people criticize Zionists, they mean Jews. You're talking anti-Semitism.”