

## The Honourable Harry S. LaForme O.C. I.P.C.

Dear Members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights,

**Re:** Written Deputation to the Justice Committee - Anti-Palestinian Racism defines Zionism as Racism

Several organizations including the Arab Canadian Lawyers Association (ACLA), Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME), the Canadian Muslim Public Affairs Council, and Independent Jewish Voices (IJV) have advocated that [anti-Palestinian racism](#) (APR) form part of Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy. The [proposed definition of APR](#) promotes a singular political and historical narrative sympathetic to Palestine, which excludes Jewish, pro-Israeli, or Zionist perspectives by labeling them as intrinsically racist. Because Zionism is often misunderstood, this distinction may not be readily apparent. To clarify, Zionism is discussed here to illustrate why many Jews and non-Jewish Zionists are alarmed by the possible adoption of this APR definition, which could unjustly brand a fundamental aspect of Jewish identity as "racist." Over 90% of Canadian Jews are Zionists, that is, believe that Israel has a right to exist as a Jewish state ([Brym, 2024](#)).

Zionism is not about unconditional support of the modern state of Israel or its government, and it is not a movement in opposition to the Palestinian people or the development of a Palestinian state. It is also not an ideology of supremacy, settler-colonialism, or oppression. Zionism, as the term is used in the 20th and 21st centuries, simply refers to the political movement for liberation of the Jewish people\* and self-determination in their ancestral homeland.

**Jews as a "people" rather than a religion.** Often defined as a religion, Jews think of being Jewish rather as being a member of a community across space and time (going back 3000+ years; the earliest mention of "Israelites" comes from a monument in Egypt dated to 1208 BCE). Judaism is not a race (Jews are found among every race on earth), and although the basis of the shared community has historically been religious, since the Enlightenment, many Jews identify as such without any religious affiliation or beliefs. There is also not a single Jewish culture, though there are shared cultural characteristics among many Jewish communities historically. Three things all Jewish communities across time and space share are: (a) a common set of texts that inform their ideas about how to live; (b) a sense of common ancestry and history; and (c) a belief in their origin from the land of Israel and a longing to return to it.

**History of the term "Zionism."** The word "Zion" originates in the Hebrew Bible, where it began as the name of the mountain in Jerusalem where King David, credited with first uniting the Jewish people 3000 years ago, is said to be buried. Within the Jewish biblical texts themselves (completed around 2300 years ago), "Zion" came to refer to the city of Jerusalem and eventually to the Land of Israel as a whole. Longing for a return to Zion, the historical meaning of "Zionism," has been part of Jewish history since the mass expulsions of Jews from Zion in 586 BCE and again in 70 CE and 135 CE. The Zionism of the past 2000 years of Jewish diaspora has largely been based in religious beliefs and idealism about the re-creation of an ideal society in an ancestral homeland.

The modern political movement known as Zionism didn't begin until 1862 with Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer's *Seeking Zion*, followed by Leon Pinsker's *Auto-Emancipation* in 1882, and Theodor Herzl's *The Jewish State* in 1896. Their works laid the foundation for an activist political return to Zion and for the majority of Jews who embraced this, it replaced the eschatological apocalyptic vision based in messianic longing that had

constituted Zionist fervor in the past. At the end of the 19th century, Herzl and his newly organized World Zionist Congress set about organizing donors, legally purchasing land in Ottoman Palestine, and inspiring Jews to escape unequal treatment and persecution around the world by joining the Jews who have continuously lived in their ancestral lands, buying them and developing them. By this time, the Jews of Russia and Eastern Europe were already fleeing pogroms and restrictions on their livelihoods and heading to Ottoman Palestine, as Jews had done throughout their history of being persecuted and expelled throughout Europe for as long as they had lived there.

**Denigration and inversion of the term “Zionism” by anti-Zionists.** “Zionism” has been systematically denigrated among the political Left in the West, not because of “occupation” or “settlements,” but rather due to an ongoing purposeful and well-documented campaign for as long as the modern political movement has existed.

*The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was first published in Imperial Russia in 1903. While it was proven to be a forgery early on, its description of a cabal of elite Jews conspiring to take over the world by subverting morals, controlling economies and the press, and working toward the ultimate goal of destroying civilization, has left an enormous and pernicious legacy in 20th and 21st century antisemitism. One of its hallmarks is the contradictory claims that Jews use capitalism and communism, Judaism and antisemitism, democracy and tyranny, in a whirlwind of Orwellian doublethink designed to appeal to anyone and everyone around the world, no matter their religion, nationality, ethnicity, economic or social status, or their politics. Popularized in the US by [Henry Ford](#) and a favorite reference of Adolf Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, this conspiracy theory – which lives on in right-wing American propaganda around figures like George Soros – became part of Nazi propaganda justifying the persecution and elimination of Jews, and in Western willingness to look the other way while it was happening.

After the Second World War, its popularity temporarily died out everywhere except in the [Middle East](#). *The Protocols* have been endorsed by Egyptian presidents Nasser and Sadat, President Arif of Iraq, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, and Colonel Gaddafi of Libya. More recently, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Sheikh Ekrima Sa’id Sabri, and the education ministry of Saudi Arabia have continued to endorse *The Protocols*, and the Palestinian Solidarity Committee of South Africa distributed copies of it at the 2001 World Conference Against Racism. And it became central to [Palestinian](#) understandings of Jews and Israel; the [1988 Hamas charter](#) states clearly that *The Protocols* embody the Zionist plan to take over the world.

Many other antisemitic allegations and conspiracy theories have emerged from the Soviet Union to directly influence Middle Eastern attitudes toward Jews, especially since the start of the Cold War. Anti-Zionism was specifically and calculatedly designed to be a form of antisemitism that employs the language of modern concerns about colonialism and racism to disguise basic Jew-hatred and to render that Jew-hatred acceptable in western discourse. Further, to be anti-Zionist is to effectively deny the right to life of millions of Jewish refugees from 60 different countries in the 1940s and 1950s who had nowhere else to go.

**Zionism is not racism.** Jews in Israel reflect all the races among whom Jews have lived for the past 3000 years. Jews are Black, Brown, Beige, and White. There are Asian Jews, Indian Jews, and African Jews. There are also many Jews who lived in Arab lands for thousands of years (before being persecuted or expelled particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries, and immigrated to Israel) who

look just like other Arabs. And the non-Jewish Arabs who currently live in Israel (21% of the population) are full citizens with equal rights and privileges. The idea that “Zionism is racism,” which became UN Resolution 3379 in 1975, also came from the USSR’s campaign to promote antisemitism to enlist support from Arab countries against the USA during the cold war. To make sure that they had the support not only of the Arab League but also the African nations, the USSR simultaneously pushed the idea that Zionism was the equivalent of South African apartheid. Although the resolution was revoked by the UN in 1991, the notion of Zionism as a form of racism, and Israel as an apartheid state persists to this day.

**Zionism is not apartheid.** The word “apartheid” comes from the South African Afrikaans language and means “separating, setting apart.” It is a legal policy that developed in White-ruled South Africa for the purpose of separating people based on their race; in that particular case, to limit the rights and freedoms of Blacks under White rule. There are just over 7 million Jews in Israel from all backgrounds, from North African to African American, from Moroccan and Yemenite to Asian and Caucasian. The other 2.5 million people who live in Israel consist of a variety of other ethnic and religious groups, with Arabs (both Christian and Muslim) comprising about 21% of the total population. These Arabs are full citizens of Israel. They are part of every aspect and class of Israeli society. An Arab-led party is one of the largest parties in the Israeli parliament. They serve in the army and are part of the justice system, all the way to the Supreme Court. There is nothing remotely “apartheid” about Israeli society – and to label it as such denies and whitewashes the horrific suffering of Blacks under an actual apartheid South African regime that enforced racist, discriminatory laws and segregation and deprived Black people of all rights. Israeli Arabs have the same legal rights as any other citizens in Israel.

**Zionism is not colonialism.** Colonialism is an outgrowth of imperialism that characterizes movements over the past 500 years, particularly by empires like Britain, France, and Spain, to colonize the new lands that they discovered and displace the indigenous inhabitants. White North Americans are likely descendants of colonialist Europeans. Over the past 2800 years, Jews in Israel were colonized by Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantine Christians, Roman/European Christians, Arabian Muslims, African Muslims, Ottoman Muslims, and British Christians. The [archaeological evidence](#) and the [DNA evidence](#) both point to the people of Israel developing out of the Canaanite peoples who lived there, who the Bible claims that they conquered. Jews are originally indigenous to ancient Canaan, later known as Israel. The land in question was called Palestine from the 2nd century CE Roman period until the 20th century British Mandate. It was named thus by the Romans as an insult to the Jews; when they expelled them, the Romans renamed the land after the ancient Jews’ biblical enemies, the Philistines – who were themselves Indo-European settler colonialists from Greece and Turkey. In the 1970s, anti-colonial movements began to spread through Africa as the final nations still under European colonial influence fought for independence.

And once again the USSR took advantage and disseminated other propaganda, this time equating the Palestinians’ fight for sovereignty to the same struggles of indigenous Africans (e.g. UN Resolution 3246 was intended to condemn Portuguese colonialism in Africa, but the USSR made sure that Palestine was also included in this resolution as a colonized entity in need of sovereignty). The false narrative co-opted by the USSR to cast Israel as a settler-colonial state persists to this day.

**Zionism is not Nazism.** The despicable equation of Jews or Israelis with Nazis, known as "[Holocaust inversion](#)," actually seems to have its origin in the British Foreign Office during the final years of Mandate Palestine, at the tail end of the Holocaust itself. High ranking British dignitaries and government officials likened Jewish refugees who might establish a Jewish state in Palestine to Nazis and noted the Jewish self-conception of superiority (again equating being "chosen" with being superior; "[chosenness](#)" is a complex and potentially problematic concept, but like everything, should be understood in context before being evaluated in terms of modern ideas about racism), and it was the British historian Arnold Toynbee who disseminated Holocaust inversion to a wider audience.

Despite arguments to the contrary, including those embedded in the ACLA definition of Anti-Palestinian Racism, once the state of Israel was created, anti-Zionism became the new antisemitism. Ironically, those on the political left who would argue vociferously that they can be anti-Zionist but not antisemitic have no idea that the origin of their neo-Marxist left-wing ideologies that have taken over the universities, the media, and that cancel any attempts at civil discourse which might argue against some of their principles, is precisely part of the calculated Soviet move to make antisemitism acceptable in its new form, that is, as anti-Zionism.

Lastly, and despite claims by "independent Jewish voices" and other groups, [more than 90% of Jews in Canada believe that Israel has the right to exist as a Jewish state](#). The definition of APR that has been advanced would therefore render a central ideology of the vast majority of Jewish Canadians inherently "racist." It would effectively deny the ability of Jews to teach about their history, to celebrate their affinity with Israel, and to express a core tenet of their religious and cultural heritage. Being Jewish and/or Zionist does not preclude support for Palestinians or their cause. Being pro-Palestinian should likewise not be predicated on anti-Zionist or antisemitic attitudes, intentions, or consequences. It is possible to rally against the discrimination of all peoples, including the Muslim community which is the subject of the Committee's current work, without instilling discrimination against some in defence of others.

*The Honourable Harry S. LaForme O.C. & I.P.C.*

Member of ALCCA

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