

Responses to Misinformation and False Statements about Israel

By Sandy Berger, February 2011

“Israel is an Apartheid State”

Israel, like the US, is a liberal democracy, in which all citizens enjoy freedom of speech, freedom of religious worship, and full participation in the political system. All Israeli citizens, including Arab Israelis (Muslim and Christian), and new immigrant citizens—whether from Europe, India or refugees from Sudan—have the same social and political rights. Unlike many of Israel’s neighboring nations, which gravely restrict such freedoms, Israel remains a bastion of freedom, pluralism and democracy – the very *antithesis* of an apartheid state.

“Zionism Is Racism”

Zionism is the national movement of the Jewish people who sought to restore their freedom and independence in their ancestral homeland. As former Israeli foreign minister Abba Eban 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.” The Jewish people have had a presence in the land of Israel for over 2,500 years; it has always been a part of their culture, history, ritual and religion. Denying the Jewish people a right systematically granted to other peoples throughout history—the right of self-determination—is itself inherently racist.

“The Israeli Occupation is the Root Cause of the Conflict”

Israel’s presence in the disputed territories is the direct result of Arab aggression against Israel: Israel gained control of these areas after winning the defensive six-day war in 1967. Terrorist attacks occurred throughout Israel before and since that war. During the 2000 peace negotiations, the Palestinian leaders rejected an Israeli proposal to withdraw from 95% of the West Bank and 100% of the Gaza Strip. Israel maintained this course, and withdrew from Gaza in 2005. Since the Hamas party won elections in 2006, thousands of rockets have been fired from Gaza onto Israeli citizens living near the Israeli-Gaza border. **Note:** Extremists often refer to the entire State of Israel as an “Occupied Territory,” questioning Israel’s very right to exist.

“Israel Rejects Peace, Denies a Palestinian State”

The Israeli government has consistently pursued various peace negotiations and supported the establishment of a Palestinian State living in peace and security alongside Israel.

- **1947:** The Jewish leadership in Palestine accepts UN Resolution 181, which calls for the partition of Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab State. Arab leadership rejects the two-state solution; the day after Israel declares its independence (1948), five Arab nations attack Israel.
- **1967:** Following the Six Day War in June, the Israeli government considers offers to return territory it had conquered in exchange for peace. However, on September 1, 1967, the Arab League declares in Khartoum, Sudan, “no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with it.”
- **1979:** Israel and Egypt sign a peace treaty resulting in the return of the Sinai Peninsula, 91% of the land conquered in the Six-Day War.
- **1993:** Israeli leader Yitzak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat shake hands on White House lawn following the Oslo Peace Talks; the outcome is the founding of the Palestinian Authority, the governing organization for parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
- **1994:** Israel signs a peace treaty with Jordan, establishing full diplomatic relations.
- **2000:** During the Camp David negotiations between Arafat and Israel’s Prime Minister Ehud Barak, the Israeli leader agrees to return 100% of Gaza and 95% of the contiguous West Bank, establish a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem and remove Jewish communities from those areas. The PLO rejected the offer, walked away from the negotiating table, and launched the Terror War of 2000-005
- **2005:** Israel withdraws from Gaza, evicting all Israeli citizens and removing all military presence.
- **2010:** According to a survey by The Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace, 71% of Israelis and 57% of Palestinians support the “two-state solution:” the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel.

“Israel’s Wall (Security Fence) Is Illegal and Must Be Removed”

Israel erected its security fence in response to countless suicide attacks that maimed and murdered hundreds of innocent Israeli civilians. Before the construction of the fence, a terrorist need only walk across an invisible line to cross from the West Bank into Israel. Beginning in September 2000, terrorist attacks and suicide bombings have killed more than 850 civilians (equivalent to approximately 4,000 US citizens) and wounded thousands more. Since construction of the fence began, the number of attacks has declined by more than 90%. The value of the fence is evident from the data: in 2002, the year before construction started, 457 Israelis were killed, in 2009, 8 Israelis were killed. A peaceful resolution of the conflict could bring down the fence.

“All Israelis Are from Eastern Europe and Descended from Holocaust Survivors”

Israel grants every Jew the right to immigrate to Israel and become a citizen. People have immigrated from all over the world to escape persecution or fulfill a Zionist dream. Israel absorbed about 750,000 Jews from Arab countries following their expulsion in 1948-1950. Immigrants continue to pour into Israel from every corner of the world including Argentina, the United States, Iraq, Russia, India and Iran. Thousands of Ethiopian Jews were airlifted to Israel in 1984 (*Operation Moses*) and 1991 (*Operation Solomon*).

“Israel Must Allow the Right of Return of Palestinian Refugees”

The idea that descendants of 1948 Arab refugees from Palestine should return to Israel has no basis in international law, is unprecedented, and serves as a euphemism for the destruction of Israel as a Jewish State.

- The Palestinian refugee problem is the direct result of the Arabs’ rejection of the 1947 UN Partition Plan, which called for the establishment of both Jewish and Arab States. Had the Arabs accepted the UN resolution, not a single Palestinian would have become a refugee and an independent Arab state would now exist beside Israel.
- Israel’s Declaration of Independence 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.” Instead, five Arab countries attacked. Before and during the ensuing war, most Palestinian Arabs left for surrounding Arab nations: Many responded to Arab leaders’ calls to make room for advancing armies, some fled to avoid being caught in the cross fire, and some were forcibly expelled. Those able to remain became Israeli citizens.
- At the same time, the fate of the Jewish people living under Arab and Islamic rule grew increasingly dire. On May 16, 1948, The New York Times declared “Jews in Grave Dangers in All Muslim Lands.” Since 1948, more than 800,000 Jews have expelled from their homes in Arab countries.
- While these Jewish refugees integrated into Israeli society, most Arab countries did not integrate the Palestinian Arabs. These refugees and their descendants receive support and assistance from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine. The 750,000 refugees, scattered throughout the Arab world, have grown to approximately 4.5 million with inherited “refugee” status.
- UN Resolution 194, passed in 1948, dealt with multiple issues relating to the 1948 war. One portion references both Arab and Jewish refugees. 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,” if they are willing to live in peace with their neighbors. Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen voted against this resolution.
- A fair resolution, addressing both the Palestinian and Jewish refugee situation, can only come through honest peace negotiations. In a two-state solution, the Palestinian refugees and their descendants could permanently settle in a future Palestinian state, just as the Jewish refugees have been absorbed in Israel.