

CCJWA Seminar: ‘Antisemitism: What Can We Do?’

Comments of Steve Lieblich, Director of Public Affairs, Jewish Community Council of WA

1. Judaism is Peoplehood

Judaism is not only a religion. It’s an ethnicity, culture... peoplehood.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks: *“The Torah is not merely a code of personal [conduct]. It is the framework for the construction of a society, a nation, a culture...”* It includes welfare, civil law, employee-employer relations, environmental protection, animal welfare, public health, and governmental and judicial systems.

2. Israel is Central and Essential to the Jewish People

Israel is where Jews were sovereign for 1500 years before Christ, and Israel has always been central to Jewish prayer, poetry, music, dreaming and longing for two millennia of exile.

Israel is the only place where Jews, as a collective, have sovereignty, self-determination and the ability to create an entire Jewish society: steeped in the language, values, calendar, history, art, music, poetry and wisdom of the Jewish people.

3. Definition of Antisemitism

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks: *“...not liking people because they’re different isn’t antisemitism. It’s xenophobia. Criticizing Israel isn’t antisemitism: it’s part of the democratic process... Antisemitism is something much more dangerous – it means **persecuting Jews and denying them the right to exist collectively as Jews with the same rights as everyone else.**”*

The IHRA (33 nations including Australia) working definition of antisemitism: *“Antisemitism ... may be expressed as hatred toward Jews... toward Jewish community institutions ... **Manifestations might include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity....**”*

4. Mutation of Antisemitism

It’s a prejudice that like a virus, has survived over time by mutating.

- *... in the Middle Ages, Jews were persecuted because of their religion, justified by theology.*
- *In the 19th and 20th centuries ... because of their race, justified by so-called science.*
- ***Today, Jews are attacked because of the existence of their nation state, Israel. Denying Israel’s right to exist is the new antisemitism. Whenever you hear human rights invoked to deny Israel’s right to exist, you are hearing the new antisemitism.***

5. Distinguishing Criticism from Antisemitism

Not all criticism of Israel is anti-Semitic, but some of it is. Extreme anti-Israel policies are often widely regarded as antisemitic, or at least provide a cover and a rationalization for antisemites to express and promote their hatred.

Famous Soviet dissident, Natan Sharansky, devised a simple “3D test” which was drawn from the deliberations of a 2004 European conference on anti-Semitism and were later adopted in The London Declaration of 2013 and by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance in 2016 (both include Australia).

demonization. When the Jewish state is being demonized; when comparisons are made between Israelis and Nazis and between Palestinian refugee camps and Auschwitz

double standards. When criticism of Israel is applied selectively; when Israel is singled out by the United Nations for human rights abuses while the behavior of known and major abusers is ignored

delegitimization: when Israel's fundamental right to exist is denied — alone among all the nations of other peoples in the world.

Regretfully, we see Australians today (“BDS” campaigners), sometimes here on the steps of this Church, purportedly championing human rights, while contravening these 3D rules. Their campaign is aimed at destroying Israel, not promoting peace between Israel and its neighbours. And we should recognise it as antisemitism.

SO: What Can We Do?

The answer (always) is EDUCATION....

- Educate to RECOGNISE antisemitism (and all forms of xenophobia); and
- Encourage to SPEAK OUT: be an UPstander not a Bystander

Above all educate/inspire the next generations to TAKE RESPONSIBILITY for improving their own lives. NOT to blame others for their failures or misfortunes and seek SCAPEGOATS (like the perennial scapegoat: the Jewish People)