

## Israel is Not an Apartheid State

Apartheid is a state-sanctioned system of racial separation and discrimination which dominated nearly every aspect of daily life in South Africa between 1948 and 1994. The accusation that Israel is an apartheid state is both factually and morally incorrect. It is a misuse of this abhorrent label to describe Israel, a society like our own, where equal rights for all are enshrined in Israel's founding document, the Declaration of Independence. In South Africa, those who were white enjoyed rights and privileges that black citizens were denied and racist laws forced citizens to live in separate areas and attend separate schools. Segregation and discrimination extended to ownership rights, the holding of public office, voting, church attendance and even burial. In contrast, Israel offers full political rights under one set of laws that extends to all citizens and minorities.

Israel, like every liberal democracy, faces challenges in ensuring fair and equitable treatment of its minority citizens. Nevertheless, Israel's track record compares favorably with other pluralistic democracies, especially when considering how precarious and vulnerable the state was for much of its existence. For example, Hebrew and Arabic are both official languages and Israeli Arabs are represented at the highest levels of public office. This includes serving as Supreme Court Judges, state ambassadors, members of the Israeli parliament (the Knesset) and government cabinet ministers. Freedoms we all cherish, such as freedom of press, speech and religion, are also centerpieces within Israeli law. All Israeli citizens - Muslims, Christians and Jews, along with significant Druze and Bahá'í populations - enjoy equal political rights and legal protection of their holy sites.

Faced with this evidence, some detractors say the "apartheid accusation" instead applies to the non-citizen Palestinian populations of Gaza and the West Bank. The situation here needs to be viewed in the context of a protracted and complex conflict between both sides. In regard to Gaza, Israel disengaged completely in 2005 and responded to Hamas' takeover in 2006 by imposing a legal naval blockade on the territory. While it is tragic that this negatively affects the civilian population of the Gaza Strip, it is important to remember that Israel was left with little option as Hamas refuses to recognize Israel and has indiscriminately fired thousands of rockets into Sderot and other vulnerable Israeli communities. While it is legitimate to take a range of critical positions about Israeli government policy – as occurs within Israeli society itself – using the term Apartheid only muddles our understanding.

In the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority oversees much of the security and social concerns of Palestinian residents. Check points, security roads, identification cards and security barriers separate Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza from Israel's citizens, providing physical security from the threat of attacks. A balance is required to ensure security for Israelis while working to ease pressure on Palestinians. This issue is constantly debated in Israel, and the High Court has heard many Palestinian submissions. Rather than misusing the concept of 'apartheid', critics should look for means to work with people of goodwill on both sides to advance towards a negotiated two-state solution that will meet the aspirations of both peoples.

While some ill-willed parties continue to abuse the term 'Apartheid' in order to detract from Israel's legitimacy, others, including the African-American student leaders of the Vanguard Leadership Group, have taken offense at this misuse. Those promoting the Apartheid allegation are simply exploiting this term to tell an anti-Israel story that undermines Israel's right to exist by falsely equating Israel to racist and genocidal regimes.



## **Talking Points**

- The accusation that Israel is an apartheid state is factually and morally incorrect. Those making this claim seek only to isolate and demonize Israel from the family of nations and undermine the right of the Jewish people, like all other peoples, to national independence in their homeland.
- Apartheid-era South Africa was a state-sanctioned system of racial separation and discrimination which dominated nearly every aspect of daily life between 1948 and 1994. This is not even remotely the case in Israel, where there is one law for all citizens and minorities have full political rights. These rights are enshrined in Israel's legal system, including its founding document – the Declaration of Independence.
- Israel, like every other liberal democracy, faces challenges in ensuring fair and equitable treatment of its minority citizens. Nevertheless, Israel's track record compares favorably with other pluralistic democracies, especially when considering how precarious and vulnerable the state was for much of its existence. Freedoms we all cherish, such as freedom of press, speech and religion, are centerpieces of Israeli law.
- Israeli citizens, regardless of race, religion, or nationality, have the ability to challenge their government's actions which Americans do not possess. A petition may be brought before the Supreme Court's High Court of Justice, which has previously allowed citizens to successfully challenge government actions and policies, including IDF operations.
- The North American Jewish community understands the difficulties facing minority populations in Israel and is fully committed to advancing civic equality so both Israeli Jews and Arabs can contribute, participate and benefit as full citizens.
- The situation in the West Bank is not comparable and must be viewed within the context of the ongoing conflict. Check points, security roads, identification cards and security barriers separate Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza from Israel's citizens, providing physical security from the threat of attacks. A balance is required to ensure security for Israelis while working to ease pressure on Palestinians. This issue is constantly debated in Israel, and the High Court has heard many Palestinian submissions. Rather than misusing the concept of 'apartheid', critics should look for means to work with people of goodwill on both sides to advance towards a negotiated two-state solution.
- It is also important to remember that Israel today is also a pluralistic and democratic society, which provides it with a method of self-correction. Israelis have a range of views on the conflict and we should build bridges with those that seek peace. Those promoting the Apartheid allegation are simply exploiting this term to tell an anti-Israel story that undermines Israel's right to exist by falsely equating Israel to racist and genocidal regimes.

### **Recommended reading:**

*"Why Depict Israel as a Chamber of Horrors Like No Other in the World?"* by Benjamin Pogrund - <http://tinyurl.com/8yqwofc>

*"An Open Letter to Tutu"* by Warren Goldstein - <http://tinyurl.com/38euuww>

*"Black Student Leaders Slam 'Apartheid' Characterization"* by Jordana Horn - <http://tinyurl.com/6zdadzk>

*"Israel and Apartheid: The Big Lie"* – ADL - <http://tinyurl.com/86jedbl>

*"Apartheid? Israel is a Democracy in which Arabs Vote"* by Benjamin Pogrund - <http://tinyurl.com/86dgryl>