

ANTI-ZIONISM AND ANTISEMITISM

WHAT IS ANTI-ZIONISM?

Zionism is derived from the word Zion, referring to the Biblical Land of Israel. In the late 19th century, Zionism emerged as a political movement to reestablish a Jewish state in Israel, the ancestral homeland of the Jewish People. Today, Zionism refers to support for the continued existence of Israel, in the face of regular calls for its destruction or dissolution. Anti-Zionism is opposition to Jews having a Jewish state in their ancestral homeland, and denies the Jewish people's right to self-determination.

HOW IS ANTI-ZIONISM ANTISEMITIC?

The belief that the Jews, alone among the people of the world, do not have a right to self-determination — or that the Jewish people's religious and historical connection to Israel is invalid — is inherently bigoted. **When Jews are verbally or physically harassed or Jewish institutions and houses of worship are vandalized in response to actions of the State of Israel, it is antisemitism.** When criticisms of Israel use antisemitic ideas about Jewish power or greed, utilize Holocaust denial or inversion (i.e. claims that Israelis are the “new Nazis”), or dabble in age-old xenophobic suspicion of the Jewish religion, otherwise legitimate critiques cross the line into antisemitism. Calling for a Palestinian nation-state, while simultaneously advocating for an end to the Jewish nation-state is hypocritical at best, and potentially antisemitic.

IS ALL CRITICISM OF ISRAEL ANTISEMITIC?

No. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's Working Definition of Antisemitism (“the IHRA Definition”) — employed by governments around the world — explicitly notes that legitimate criticism of Israel is **not** antisemitism: “Criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic.”¹ When anti-Zionists call for the end of the Jewish state, however, that is no longer criticism of policy, but rather antisemitism.

WHAT ABOUT BDS?

The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement and leadership, including founder Omar Barghouti, call for the elimination of Israel as a Jewish state.² The BDS Movement operates under the guise of social justice and Palestinian rights, but **the end goal of the movement is to undermine and eliminate Jewish rights.** In addition, BDS supports “anti-normalization” — which seeks to make taboo any cooperation between Israelis and Arabs. On college campuses, this extends to urging people who see themselves as allies of the Palestinian cause to marginalize Jewish students (unless those students preemptively disavow Zionism). This can also be a form of antisemitism because it renders collaboration impossible except on Palestinian terms, removing agency from individual Jews. It is important to note, however, that while the BDS movement has antisemitic motivations, supporters of the movement are not ipso facto antisemitic; many supporters are unaware of the movement's antisemitic foundation and mistakenly believe that BDS is a way to express their sympathy for Palestinians.

HOW MUCH OF AN ISSUE IS ANTI-ZIONISM ON CAMPUS?

Recent episodes on college campuses reveal a striking number of antisemitic acts veiled behind anti-Zionism:

- In October 2019, a Holocaust survivor was interrogated by a member of SJP during a speaking engagement at Benedictine University. The student demanded that the survivor *“condemn the establishment of the Zionist Israeli state.”*³
- In October 2019, non-Jewish student leaders at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign declared that anti-Zionism was not antisemitic to justify a residential life presentation with *deeply antisemitic themes.*⁴
- In May 2020, students at George Washington University included the phrase *“Zionism is Racism”* in a widely circulated letter calling for inclusivity.⁵
- In August 2020, a Jewish student government representative at the University of Southern California resigned following incessant bullying and an impeachment campaign launched because of *her identity as a Zionist.*⁶

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

Educate: It is important to learn about contemporary forms of antisemitism, and to educate others.

Build Coalitions: Work with students on your campus to help elevate and protect one another. Working with other student groups promotes mutual understanding and allows you the opportunity to share your own experiences. In the fight against antisemitism, we need Jewish and non-Jewish advocates.

Advocate: Work with other students to identify specific policies you can advocate for to improve the experience of Jewish students on your campus. One great example is for your student government and campus administration to adopt the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism.

Speak out: When you see anti-Zionism on campus or in your classroom, confront it. It is vitally important that we continue to use our voices to draw attention to problematic language and rhetoric in education. AJC is always a resource for student leaders looking to stand up against antisemitism. Get in touch at campus@ajc.org.

1: <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism>

2: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/bds-in-their-own-words>

3: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinian-student-tells-holocaust-survivor-israel-guilty-of-ethnic-cleansing/>

4: <https://dailyillini.com/news/2019/10/21/isg-debates-anti-zionism-anti-semitism-distinction/>

5: <https://jewishinsider.com/2020/05/gw-university-under-fire-for-appointing-bds-activist-to-head-international-affairs-school/>

6: <https://www.jweekly.com/2020/08/11/s-f-native-resigns-from-usc-student-government-over-israel-views/>