

IHRA definition and claims Israel is a 'racist endeavour'

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism includes a set of working examples of antisemitism. It says that 'denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination' could be antisemitic if for example it is claimed 'the State of Israel is a racist endeavour.'

What does this mean?

The establishment of the State of Israel was the realisation of a political idea - Zionism - the national liberation movement of the Jewish people that sought national self-determination for the Jewish people. This goal was achieved in 1948 when the State of Israel was established in the historic homeland of the Jewish people. The international antisemitism definition states that if you declare that *Jews don't have a right to self-determination*, unlike other people. Or that the *Jews don't deserve to have a state* then that could be antisemitic. Some criticise Israel as a Jewish state because they claim its racist to have a state that prioritises one ethnic group. Firstly this is not true because there are many states in the world that have a dominant ethnic group from which the national symbols and culture primarily derive. Secondly the context for creating a Jewish state is important. The Jewish people are one of the most persecuted minorities in history. Centuries of persecution by Christian rulers in Europe on religious grounds evolved after the enlightenment into persecution on racial grounds culminating in the horrors of the holocaust and the death of 6 million Jews. The Jewish people have always sought to return to their historic homeland to escape persecution and the creation of Israel was intended as a refuge to protect them.



But what about Israel's conflict with the Palestinians?

Some claim that Israel is racist because they believe the establishment of Israel inevitably led to conflict and harm to the Palestinians. They distort the complex history and claim that Israel was a project intended to lead to war and remove the Palestinians from the land. The historical record is very different.

The Zionist project was based on the idea of creating a Jewish national home in Palestine, not in all of Palestine - that difference is important. The idea of a Jewish national home was enshrined in International law by the League of Nations when it granted a mandate to Britain to rule the territory and gradually build up the Jewish national home. Jewish immigrants legally purchased land and expanded their communities. Arab leaders were opposed to any kind of Jewish self-rule in the area and opposed it politically and then violently. After waves of riots and revolts Britain proposed that the land be divided into a Jewish and an Arab state. The Zionists accepted the idea but the Arabs opposed it. After the second world war and the holocaust there was increasing international pressure for Britain to let Jewish survivors move to Palestine. The United Nations General Assembly approved a plan to divide the land into a Jewish and an Arab state. The Jews accepted it and the Arabs opposed it. After the vote the Palestinians launched a war against the Jews. Neighbouring Arab states joined that war. This was all avoidable. In the context of that bitter war hundreds of thousands of Palestinians left the country and some were forced out by Israeli soldiers. If the Palestinians had accepted the UN plan there would have been no war and no refugees.

Labour, Israel & Antisemitism

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But doesn't Israel mean a denial of Palestinian self-determination?

Before the State of Israel was established this was an area of land that had a mixed community. In ancient times, it was a Jewish kingdom, later it was ruled by Christians and then by Arab Muslims. But each community was always an integral part of the land. The myth of a centuries old homogeneous Palestinian community ruined by Zionism is as inaccurate as the myth of a "land without a people". Any modern solution to sharing the land had to take this into account. The argument that the Jews have no rights to the land is just as absurd as the idea that the Palestinians don't. The two-state solution is the least worst option that reconciles the national claims of Israelis and Palestinians. It recognises the right of Palestinian self-determination and negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians have been based on the idea that Israel will grant independence to the Palestinians as part of a negotiated agreement.



But how does Israel deal with its minorities if it's a Jewish state?

Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East, the only country where all religions can be freely adhered to and the only country in the region where LGBT communities are free from persecution.

Israel's Declaration of Independence says it will 'ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.'

In Israel - as in many other societies, including our own - there are certainly gaps between the majority and minority communities and examples of racism can be found. However, in a recent poll 63 per cent of the Arab citizens of Israel say that they have a positive view of living in Israel and 60 per cent have a favourable view of the State.

We Believe in Israel is a UK grassroots network of thousands of people united in believing in the right of the State of Israel to live in peace and security. We are a broad-based and inclusive coalition, open to anyone, from across the political and religious spectrum.

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