Conversation Guide Building Support for Israel

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Conversation Guide: Building Support for Israel and Combating Antisemitism

With Non-Jewish Friends, Neighbors and Colleagues

What they need to know

1. **The humanitarian crisis in Gaza is terrible but it would end immediately if Hamas surrendered and released the hostages**. Hamas deliberately uses the civilian population of Gaza, 2.4 million people, as human shields. Hamas exploits civilian suffering for propaganda against Israel. Hamas command centres, weapons storage and rocket launchers are located in the midst of schools, hospitals, UNRWA aid offices and homes. Resources that flowed into Gaza for years, such as building supplies and raw materials, were devoted to war-making as the top priority. Hamas built a huge tunnel system, more extensive than the London Underground, to conceal its terror apparatus and shelter its leadership. Hamas built no bomb shelters or civilian infrastructure for the civilian population. Why is Gaza dependent on imported food, water and energy? It is critical for the people of Gaza, not just Israel, that Hamas no longer control Gaza.

2. **News media focus heavily on civilian suffering in coverage of the Gaza war**. News media almost exclusively show photos and video of the destruction in Gaza. They report incident by incident on deaths and show grieving family members. That is truly tragic. On the other hand, few stories portray the war from the perspective of Israel. We don't hear how families of Israeli hostages are coping with their uncertain fate. We don't hear from the families of Israeli soldiers killed or wounded in Gaza. We don't hear about the more than 200,000 Israelis evacuated from border areas near Gaza and in the north under threat from Hezbollah who have no idea when they can go home.

3. **It's not only up to Israel to minimize civilian casualties and suffering** . If Hamas surrendered and released the hostages, the war would end and there would be no more civilian suffering. If Egypt opened its Gaza border to Palestinian refugees, they would be able to escape the war. Israel, for its part, tries to minimize civilian casualties in Gaza while fighting a war that it must win. Israel must value the lives of its soldiers equally with those of civilians in Gaza. Nevertheless, Israel urges civilians to evacuate from areas of intense conflict. It gives warnings when possible. But civilian casualties are inevitable given the dense, urban environment of the war and the deliberate strategy of Hamas to put civilians in danger and exploit their suffering.

4. **Hamas is a terrorist, radical Islamist organization**. Hamas has controlled the Gaza Strip since since 2007, when it ousted the Palestinian Authority from power. It broke a ceasefire when it launched a horrific, murderous attack on Israel on October 7, 2023. That attack took place early on a Saturday morning, the Jewish Sabbath and a holy day, Simchat Torah. In the attack, 3,000 terrorists killed 1,200 people, mainly civilians, committed systematic sexual violence, mutilated victims and took 253 hostages into Gaza. Hamas, like Hezbollah in Lebanon, is a proxy for the Islamic Republic of Iran, which arms and funds it.

5. **The avowed goal of Hamas is to eliminate Israel and establish an Islamist regime in all of Israel-Palestine**. All Jews would be expelled or killed, according to the Hamas Charter. For years after Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza in 2005 and up to the present, Hamas and other terror groups launched thousands of rockets into Israeli towns and nearby

kibbutzim. Hamas built tunnels under the border to infiltrate into Israel and perpetrate attacks. Hamas has always firmly opposed a “two-state solution” and a peaceful, negotiated end to the conflict. Hamas has promised to repeat the October 7th attack again and again.

6. **Israel’s war aims are legitimate**. They are: to destroy Hamas as the ruling power in Gaza; to rescue/recover the remaining 130 hostages (of whom perhaps fewer than 100 remain alive); and to prevent attacks like that of October 2023 from ever occurring again. The war, painful as it is on all sides, must go on until those aims are achieved.

7. **Israel is the nation state of the Jewish people**. Israel is the only country in which the Jewish people have sovereignty and control their own destiny. The Holocaust demonstrated what happens when Jews do not have a country. Jews are the indigenous people of Israel, dating back more than 3,000 years. King David established Jerusalem as the capital of Israel 1,000 years before the rise of Christianity and 1,600 years before the rise of Islam. Jewish communities continued to exist in Israel throughout the centuries after the Roman conquest and expulsions. For 2,000 years Jews constantly prayed for the return to Israel and Jerusalem. In the 19th century, political Zionism arose as the national liberation movement of the Jewish people and more Jews came to live in and work the land. In 1948, modern Israel was founded after an affirmative vote of the United Nations. Israel today is a Middle Eastern country; a majority of Israelis originate from countries in the Middle East and north Africa, not Europe.

8. **It is false to call Israel an “apartheid state**.” Palestinian citizens of Israel, also known as Arab Israelis, have full civil and political rights. They now number 2.1 million out of Israel’s 10 million population. Overwhelmingly, they do not want to live in a Palestinian state.

9. **It is false to say that Israel’s occupation of Palestine is the root cause of the war.** Hamas is determined to wipe out all of Israel inside and outside its 1948 borders. Hamas and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) that controls the West Bank both reject Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state. An independent Palestinian state could have been in place as early as 1948 but local Arab leaders and the Arab League rejected the 1947 partition plan and attacked the new State of Israel. Successive governments

of Israel were willing to negotiate withdrawal from territories occupied in the 1967 war. In 2005, Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza. Both Hamas and the PLO have greeted repeated peace-making efforts going back to the Oslo Accords of 1993-1995 with repeated waves of terror attacks. Palestinian terror attacks, culminating in the atrocities of October 7, are the cause of the war**.**

10. **Jews are currently experiencing an unprecedented wave of antisemitism and anti-Israel actions**. Stimulated by the October 7 Hamas attack and the ongoing war in Gaza, increasingly aggressive pro-Palestine demonstrations have targeted Jewish institutions, neighbourhoods and individuals across the country. University campuses have become hostile zones for Jewish students. Jewish-owned businesses have been vandalized and fire-bombed. Jewish students are harassed on campuses. Pro-Palestine demonstrators chant “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.” Jews understand that as a call for the elimination of Israel and the extermination of every Israeli. Demonstrators praise the Hamas attack of October 7 as an appropriate response to Israeli occupation. They call Israel an “apartheid state” and a “colonial oppressor.” Jews who support Israel are said to be complicit in these “crimes.” They call the war in Gaza “genocide.” Those who falsely and grotesquely accuse Israel of genocide are themselves the advocates of genocide. The police law-enforcement response to pro-Palestine demonstrations has been uneven, varying from state to state, which emboldens the demonstrators.

11. **Anti-Israel and antisemitic attacks threaten the values of tolerance and mutual respect that sustain our social fabric**. Imagine if Jews were to demonstrate against the Hamas attack at mosques or in Muslim neighbourhoods or at Muslim-owned businesses. If intimidating, hateful demonstrations are accepted as the norm, other groups may adopt such tactics. Demonstrators who literally and figuratively trample norms of democratic life would not hesitate to trample the institutions of democracy.

What they can do

1. **Condemn the atrocities that Hamas committed on October 7**: a surprise attack that violated a ceasefire on the Sabbath and a Jewish holy

day; the murder of 1,200 people, mostly civilians, with gruesome violence and mutilation; taking 253 hostages, including women, children, men, the sick and the elderly; systematic sexual violence against women and men; and filming and posting video and images of the attack on social media.

2. **Support Israel's just war against Hamas**. Tell friends and family, colleagues and neighbours that the war must continue until Hamas is defeated or surrenders. Communicate that to news media with letters and commentary.

3. **Tell the government to**: continue strongly supporting Israel's just war; condemn the use of civilians in Gaza as human shields and the exploitation of their suffering by Hamas; demand that Hamas surrender and release the hostages unconditionally; cut off funding to UNRWA, which supported and gave cover to Hamas; reject the decision of the International Court of Justice to even consider South Africa's groundless assertion that Israel's war in Gaza is a genocide.

4. **Call out media bias against Israel in coverage of the war**. Demand that news media balance reporting on civilian suffering in Gaza with reporting on: Hamas tactics that maximize civilian deaths and exploit suffering for political impact; the lack of action by other parties, such as Egypt, to alleviate suffering; Israel's efforts to limit civilian casualties and expedite humanitarian relief; the sacrifices and losses that Israelis are enduring in the war, including the families of hostages, the experience of hostages held by Hamas, including sexual abuse and lack of medical attention, and the hardship of Israelis evacuated from border areas; Israeli soldiers killed and wounded, some of them because of efforts to avoid civilian deaths.

5. **Tell Jewish friends, neighbours and colleagues that you understand their distress about the war and rising antisemitism and offer support**. This is a time to communicate and tell them you care. Listen to their concerns and consider how you can help. They may have experienced anti-Israel or antisemitic harassment. They may have been intimidated at a Jewish place of worship, community centre, university or business. They may have been challenged at school or in the workplace as a Jew or as a supporter of Israel.

6. **Speak out against hateful, inciteful demonstrations against Israel and Jews**. When pro-Palestine demonstrators break the law, call on police to enforce the law. We should not allow trespassing on private property, intimidating behaviour, inciteful speech, and blocking access to institutions, public places and events.

7. **Join with Jewish people when there are counter-demonstrations to show support for Israel and the resolve of the Jewish community**. We should not cede the streets and neighbourhoods to pro-Palestine, pro-Hamas demonstrators. We should not accept that it is okay to bully and block access to people coming and going from Jewish institutions or public events. We should not tolerate it when demonstrators shout hateful and inciteful slogans and carry signs with such messages. Join us when we go out publicly to show our resolve and tell our side of the story.

8. **Stand with Jews and other religious and cultural communities when there are issues that threaten core American values**. Freedom to practice religion, security, combating racism and hate, fostering tolerance and mutual respect, the rule of law and other such values are the bedrock of our civil, democratic society. We need to work together with allies issue by issue to protect the values and the way of life that we cherish.

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