



**NONE SHALL
BE AFRAID**
FIGHTING ANTI-SEMITISM

Anti-Semitism in the Middle East

Various manifestations of anti-Semitism are ingrained in the Middle East. However, Israel's peace treaties with Egypt, Jordan and other Muslim countries, as well as covert relations with many other Muslim and Arab states, prove that tolerance and even acceptance in the region are possible.

Anti-Semitism is a deep-seated phenomenon in the Middle East that has its roots in both religious tenets and the historical narrative of Islam, going back to its foundation some 1,500 years ago, and in the rivalry between Israel and the surrounding Muslim populations and countries dating to the early period of Jewish renaissance in the Land of Israel. In the interim, Jews in Arab lands were a tolerated minority, but lived as second-class citizens (Dhimmi). The late preeminent expert on anti-Semitism Robert Wistrich wrote that hard-core anti-Semitism in the Arab and Muslim world is comparable only with that of Nazi Germany, describing Muslim hatred for Israel and Jews as "an eliminatory anti-Semitism with a genocidal dimension."

The Muslim Brotherhood, established in 1928 in Egypt, is a virulently anti-Semitic movement. Its founder, cleric Hassan al-Banna, was a devout admirer of Adolf Hitler. The movement planned to bring the Holocaust to the Middle East, establishing a terror network to deal first with Egyptian, then Palestinian Jewry. The decisive transfer of traditionally European anti-Semitic tropes to the Arab world took place between 1937 and 1945 as part of Nazi propaganda, led from Berlin by the Brotherhood-affiliated Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husayni. In a speech in 1944 to imams of the Bosnian SS division, he said that "in the fight against Judaism, Islam and National Socialists are very close to each other." These attitudes have continued in Israel through statements made by leaders of the Islamic Movement.

Successive Pew Research Center global studies have showed that respondents in many Muslim countries overwhelmingly view Jews unfavorably, with only 2 percent to 4 percent viewing Jews favorably in countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Pakistan and Egypt, as well as within the Palestinian Authority. As pointed out by anti-Semitism researcher Manfred Gerstenfeld, anti-Jewish racist attitudes among upper-class Muslims were illustrated by the applause that greeted then-Malaysian prime minister Mohamad Mahathir at a meeting of the Organization of Islamic Conference in 2003 when he declared that "[T]oday the Jews rule this world by proxy" and called for the Muslim world to "stop to think, to assess our weaknesses and our strength, to plan, to strategize and then to counter-attack."

The broad adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition that defines forms of anti-Israel bias as "antisemitism" has put to rest a decades-old argument that criticism of Israel cannot be defined as anti-Semitism since it is directed at a sovereign state. The principal government purveyors of the most blatant anti-Semitism in the Middle East today — including blood libels, conspiracy theories, Holocaust denial and inversion, etc. — are the Palestinian Authority and the Islamic Republic of Iran, where anti-Semitism is rampant in the official educational system, mosques, media and popular culture. Palestinian Media Watch had documented countless examples of anti-Jewish incitement, dividing these into categories such as "animalization," "Jews/Israelis are evil," "Jews/Israelis are cancer and other diseases," "Jews/Israelis



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endanger all humanity,” etc. In Iran, state-sponsored cultural organizations have held international Holocaust-denial cartoon competitions. The automatic majority against Israel in international bodies such as the U.N. and its specialized agencies, the African Union and the Non-Aligned Movement is sustained through bloc voting by Muslim countries and their dependents against Israel.

With the advent of massive immigration from the Middle East to Europe and the West over the last 20 years, forms of overt anti-Semitism, which had been latent there due to the moral obstacle placed by the Holocaust — except for fringe fascist elements — are now a tolerated phenomenon in the public space, including in demonstrations, social media and public discourse.

Data compiled by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights and other sources show that Muslims in Europe account for a disproportionate percentage of anti-Semitic incidents.

The Kantor Center for the Study of European Jewry at Tel Aviv University found in its report “Antisemitism Worldwide,” covering 2019 and the beginning of 2020, that coronavirus-inspired anti-Semitic expressions in the form of traditional Jew-hatred and conspiracy theories are promoted also by Islamists, concluding that “The return of traditional, classic antisemitic stereotypes as well as the intensification of anti-Israeli and Islamist antisemitism, have contributed to the growing role of the antisemitic discourse that moved from the fringes of society into the mainstream public discourse.” As reported by Haaretz, this is true also in Turkey, where coronavirus-related anti-Semitic conspiracy theories were broadcast on government-controlled media at the outbreak of the pandemic there, without sanction.



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