

STEP UP FOR ISRAEL

Apartheid Allegation Discussion Guide

What is apartheid?

Apartheid, which means “apartness” in Afrikaans, was a system of institutionalized racism that characterized the country of South Africa from 1948-1994. Under the government-sanctioned system of apartheid, black African rights were curtailed and the rights of the minority were given primacy. The population of South Africa was separated along racial lines: individuals were issued identity cards that categorized them by race; towns were designated as “white,” “black,” “coloured” and “Indian.” So-called “mixed marriages” between races were outlawed, and municipal areas were segregated, leading to separate buses, beaches, drinking fountains, hospitals, schools, etc. Services provided to non-whites were usually inferior to those provided to whites. Non-whites were not enfranchised under the apartheid system.

Apartheid was condemned throughout the world, including by the United Nations, the Catholic Church, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and by many governments and prominent individuals. South Africa was subjected to boycott and divestment actions because of its system of oppression against its non-white population. Apartheid was eventually dismantled after three years of internal negotiations, culminating in open elections for the entire country in 1994. Today, “apartheid” is sometimes used to describe any state-sanctioned segregation or discrimination of minority groups’ rights or civil liberties.

What is the “apartheid allegation?”

The apartheid allegation is often used by Israel’s detractors to attempt to isolate her from Western, democratic nations. Deligitimizers compare Israel to South Africa, and claim that Israel is an “apartheid state” with institutionalized, government-sanctioned policies of racism and discrimination against its Arab citizens, along with Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza. Comparing Israel to apartheid South Africa is common among those participating in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS) against Israel, and is in fact one of the core tenants of the movement.

Is Israel an “apartheid state?”

Israel is not an apartheid state. Israel is a democracy governed by the rule of law, where all its citizens, including its many minorities, have equal rights. These rights have been afforded

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all citizens from the moment of Israel's founding, and are laid out in Israel's Declaration of Independence. Non-Jews, including Arabs and Druze, hold positions in government and in the Israeli Supreme Court. Israel's Knesset currently has a dozen Arab-Israeli Knesset members, while Arab-Israeli judge Salim Joubran is a lifetime member of the Supreme Court. Any Israeli citizen may challenge a policy of the Israeli government by bringing suit to the Supreme Court's High Court of Justice, a right that American citizens themselves do not possess in the United States. Israel's society, while it does have many challenges, is, for the most part, open and pluralistic, and is able to boast a spirited internal debate about civil rights, and government and military policies. Israel's system of governance is the antithesis of apartheid South Africa's; to suggest otherwise is to defame and demonize the Jewish state.

But what about the disputed territories?

The disputed territories, or, as they are commonly referred to, the "West Bank" and/or "Judea and Samaria," along with the Gaza Strip, are often linked to the apartheid allegation, with Israel's detractors accusing it of practicing apartheid against Palestinians residing in those areas. This is a false accusation.

The Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza are not citizens of Israel; rather, they are ruled by their own democratically elected governments, Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, which controls the governance of the vast majority of Palestinians in the West Bank. In accordance with the Oslo Accords, Israel still maintains military control in and around Palestinian-ruled areas in order to prevent terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians. Israel's security measures, including checkpoints, identification cards, security roads, and security barriers, are designed to address Israel's serious safety concerns. These measures are not designed or intended to create a system of segregation, but rather to protect innocent civilians from the constant threat of terrorism and guerilla warfare. The status of Judea and Samaria and of the people residing in it is currently on the table of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

What is Israel Apartheid Week?

Israel Apartheid Week (IAW) is an annual international campaign that seeks to build support for the idea of Israel as an apartheid state. A tactic of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS), IAW's end goal is the same as that of the larger BDS movement: the end of

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Israel as a Jewish and Democratic state. IAW often, though not always, takes place on college campuses with a week-long series of inflammatory events, sometimes featuring street theater like student activist “die-ins,” as well as the infamous “apartheid wall,” which is generally constructed in prominent places on campus quads and is meant to represent the separation barrier that divides areas in the disputed territories from Israel proper. Anti-Israel activists on college campuses often seek to take advantage of the week’s events to engage new students in the BDS movement on campus.

What do I do if Israel Apartheid Week comes to my campus or community?

You may be tempted to refute the apartheid allegation and shout the facts about Israel from the rooftops. Fortunately, not every community or college campus has a strong anti-Israel presence, or even hosts an Israel Apartheid Week (IAW). In fact, studies show that 70% of Americans are not pro- or anti-Israel — they’re simply apathetic. Therefore, it is important to have a nuanced understanding of your community and to understand the needs of your peers and constituents. If your campus or community is not experiencing a problem with anti-Israel messages, we suggest that you focus on the positive rather than give more airtime to the negative. Engage your audience with the Israel you love, and introduce them to the elements of Israeli society, culture and history that inspire you.

If IAW does come to your community, be thoughtful, proactive and positive. Engaging with volatile and angry demonstrators makes you look angry and volatile. Consider hosting events that highlight the indigenous, historical and legal rights of the Jewish People to their homeland. You can invite speakers to address real human rights atrocities in the Middle East or gender and religious discrimination in the Arab world. This does not mean ignoring valid critique of Israel’s flaws, but it does expose the hypocrisy of IAW organizers who single out the only democracy in the Middle East. You can also write letters to campus and alumni newspapers and magazines that provide a nuanced view of Israel’s political complexities and security challenges in a hostile and unstable region. Engage with your university through the Alumni and Development offices to make sure the university isn’t actively supporting IAW programs. Take advantage of the attention and educate others about what Israel is really like — sharing your stories with friends co-workers, classmates and peers will help them overcome their apathy and become interested and invested in the Israel that you know and love.