Antisemitism vs. Criticism of Israel State Policies

The RECE steering committee and sub-groups have compiled the following information for RECE members on the important distinctions between Antisemitism and criticism of Israel and its policies. While not everyone will agree with the content of some of the resources presented here, they do provide RECE members with information on this complex situation.

The following is an abridged version of a statement from Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/ that addresses this issue. The text below is drawn verbatim from the JVP site article and has not been edited or altered except to shorten it. https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/fighting-antisemitism/.

“Antisemitism can be understood as discrimination against, violence towards, or stereotypes of Jews for being Jewish. Antisemitism has manifested itself in structural inequality, dispossession, expulsion, and genocide, with the most well-known examples being in Europe, with the Spanish Inquisition, the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492, and the Nazi Holocaust in the 1940s. Antisemitism does not impact all of us who identify as Jewish in the same way. The experiences and histories of Jews of color and/or Sephardi/Mizrahi Jews are distinct from those of white, Ashkenazi Jews. Jewish communities around the world have had different experiences with discrimination, bigotry, and violence.”

[...]

“At various points in history, this form of antisemitism has had secular institutional and governmental support, reaching its apex in the mass violence against Jews and other groups during the Nazi Holocaust. In the United States today, even as the Trump administration emboldens and empowers antisemitism in the form of in incidents of bigotry, violence, or speech, it is not currently reinforced by state institutions in the same ways that racism, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim bigotry are through state violence, mass incarceration, and surveillance. We commit to fighting racism, Islamophobia, and antisemitism – we all need to be vigilant as we [JVP] expect these forms of bigotry and oppression to gain greater intensity in the coming years.”

[...]

“Contemporary expressions of antisemitism include treating Jewish people as a monolithic group, stereotyping Jewish people as rich or greedy, or demonizing Jews as all-powerful or as secretly in control of political events. These tropes are evident when the U.S. is exempted from responsibility for its unconditional support of Israeli apartheid, and instead the U.S.-Israel relationship is blamed solely on Jewish power. The white nationalists known as the “alt-right,” for example, staunchly support Israel even as they disseminate and perpetuate antisemitic myths of Jewish control and power.” See http://mondoweiss.net/2016/08/breitbart-s-right-israelpalestine/

“Antisemitism does not operate in a vacuum; we must fight it along with Islamophobia, sexism, classism, and homophobia as well as anti-Arab, anti-Black, and other forms of racism, as part of the work of dismantling all systems of oppression. As we fight antisemitism, we must also examine how inaccurate, misleading, or problematic definitions of antisemitism have a harmful impact on movements for justice. We [JVP] see these harmful definitions most often in attempts to defend Israeli policies, in anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies, and sometimes even in progressive movements.”

[...]
“Definitions of antisemitism that treat criticism of Israel or of Zionism as inherently antisemitic are inaccurate and harmful. The majority of Jews are not Israeli, and not all citizens of Israel are Jewish. Israel is a state; Zionism is a political ideology; Judaism and Jewish identity encompass a diversity of religious and secular expressions and a robust, varied set of traditions, cultures, and lived experiences. The misplaced focus of those who demonize Palestinian rights advocacy while ignoring or defending the antisemitism of white supremacists dilutes the understanding of antisemitism and makes it ever more difficult to fight”.

[...]

“JVP’s criticism of Israeli policies comes from a desire to see justice realized for all peoples in the region. For many of us, such criticism is rooted in our Jewish values and traditions. While it is antisemitic to criticize the State of Israel based solely on the Jewish identity of most Israeli citizens or leaders, criticism of the Israeli state that is based on its past and present actions is not antisemitic. Likewise, advocating for justice for Palestinians, including recognizing their right of return, is not antisemitic. Israel should be held accountable for its discriminatory policies, which systematically deny Palestinians, and to varying degrees Mizrahi, Sephardi, and Ethiopian Jews, access to equal treatment and human rights.”

“Those seeking to maintain the status quo in Palestine/Israel routinely use false charges of antisemitism, and harmful and inaccurate definitions of antisemitism, in an attempt to silence voices critical of Israeli policies towards Palestinians. No one should underestimate the power of an accusation of antisemitism, and when false charges of antisemitism are used to deflect Israel’s responsibility for the dispossession of Palestinians, they should be recognized as censorship. At the same time, supporters of Palestinian rights are not immune from racist, sexist, and/or antisemitic behavior, and this behavior must be addressed when it occurs. Likewise, one can be antisemitic or condone antisemitism and emphatically support the far-right government of Israel.”

[End of JVP statement]

For a brief introduction to the history and reality of Palestine/Israel watch this short video: https://youtu.be/Y58njT2oXfE

Further useful sources for information:

https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/
https://www.btselem.org/
https://electronicintifada.net/
https://www.972mag.com/
https://bdsmovement.net/