

Israel-Palestine Q&A

Over one million Avaaz members have responded highly enthusiastically to [this Israel-Palestine campaign](#), we're also seeing a number of thoughtful critiques of our position, ones that merit consideration and response. We don't always get it 100% right, and hearing from members helps us to do so in the future. We really appreciate the time members took in sharing opinions and information with us, and so sorry this is long, but I wanted to address the core points, which are:

- a) This campaign is one sided and anti-Israel
- b) Avaaz appears to condone Hamas
- c) Muslim nations have refused to recognise the right for Israel to exist
- d) Israel makes strong efforts to protect Gazan civilians
- e) Palestinian people suffer not because of Israel, but because of the Palestinian leadership
- f) Settlements are not 'illegal'

The most common concern expressed is that this campaign was one-sided and anti-Israel. I can understand how some people might feel it's one-sided, since the campaign is focused on pressuring Israel to change its policies. But I want to be clear that we have no intention of this being anti-Israel. On the contrary, we feel that our campaign offers one of the few directions that can save Israel as we know it.

There's a lot of anti-semitism in the world. The Jewish people have suffered tremendously in the last century and before and they deserve a safe and secure home. That's why the Avaaz community has supported a two-state solution, with safety, security and peace for both Israel and Palestine. Our team and movement are pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian, and the great many Jews among our leadership, team members and membership oppose anti-Semitism as much as any racism or prejudice. Over the years our community has continually campaigned for peace talks by which both sides could reach a mutually acceptable solution. It's become clear to almost everyone, however, that talks are not yet the answer to this conflict. Conflicts end when the sides want to end them, when the pain of the conflict is so great that each side is willing to make serious concessions for peace. Palestinians, particularly in Gaza, suffer tremendously from the status quo. Israelis however, while experiencing psychological discomfort from the conflict, have successfully built a 'fortress Israel' that insulates the country from serious costs to maintaining the status quo. Partly as a result, Israeli politics has moved to the right steadily for years, increasingly unwilling to make the concessions necessary for a sustainable peace, and increasingly quick to resort to violent and repressive policies. It's been chilling to see how many right-wingers in Israel are now openly talking about expulsion and ethnic cleansing of Israeli Arabs.

For this reason, the world has slowly turned to see Israeli policy, leaders like Netanyahu and Avigdor Lieberman, and the increasingly powerful and radical settler lobby, as presenting a serious impediment to peace. We have continuously polled the Avaaz community for the last seven years to guide our campaigning, and over the last few years our members have shifted from opposing divestment-type efforts on Israel to being overwhelmingly supportive of this most recent campaign. Even US Secretary of State Kerry cited the threat of economic and social isolation as he tried to push Israel to negotiate earlier this year. That's why this campaign is focused on changing Israel's cost-benefit analysis.

This campaign is aimed at ending the occupation policy of the State of Israel, and targets specific companies and individuals that support or benefit from that policy. It is not against Israel's citizens. If you have followed Avaaz, you will know that we regularly call out other governments in the region and throughout the world for abuses. The same applies here. To address the violence we need to address

the decades long dispossession of the Palestinian people and the occupation of millions. Even though the UN voted to recognise Palestinian statehood; it is still under occupation, Palestinians are not able to control their revenues, resources, or move freely on their land. Their lives are all still managed by Israel. The people of both Palestine and Israel want freedom and peace, and the only long-term solution is to end the violent occupation that benefits no one, tears families apart and entrenches distrust.

We do not condone Hamas and Palestinian extremists at all. Terrorism is never justified, and Hamas rockets are terrorist weapons, indiscriminately falling on civilian targets. Yes, Hamas did fire many rockets before Israel retaliated. But we see Hamas and the Israeli right wing as working together to ensure that the cycles of conflict and demonisation continue - Hamas fires rockets, Israel responds with excessive bombing that kills hundreds, so Hamas fires more rockets. Hamas deserves much pressure too, but is already under crippling sanctions and facing every kind of pressure. And while their anti-semitism and terrorism are disgusting, they claim legitimacy by fighting a grotesque decades long oppression by the Israeli state and military that has wrought untold misery, deprivation and death on the Palestinian people. Regardless of who started this or that round of the conflict, there is an ongoing conflict, and the only way to solve it, is to end this repressive nearly half century old occupation. This campaign is a serious attempt to try to get closer to that end.

The Israel-Palestinian conflict is not about Muslims versus Jews, although that is how many extremists seek to portray it. At the core, this conflict is about two peoples: Palestinians and Israelis who want to ensure they and their families are safe, their rights are protected, and dignity respected so that they can pursue life and opportunity. While the Palestinian people are still stateless, and the world has recognised Israel since 1948, it is true that 32 nations have not yet recognised Israel's right to exist. The majority have offered to do so, and to fully normalize relations with Israel in return for Israel recognising the Palestinian people's rights. This has been the clear position of the Arab League in what has become known as the Arab Peace Initiative, and the majority of these countries worked with US Secretary of State John Kerry to help reach an agreement.

It is also important to note that although many Muslim countries claim to support Palestine, on the ground, Palestinian refugees are not given equal rights and are suppressed in many of these countries. That's one of the reasons why they have been asking for a state of their own. Calling on Palestinians to give up their right to self-determination on their land because there are other Muslim countries who can take them is similar to calling on the French to give up France because there are other Christian nations. Moreover, Palestinians are not just Muslim. There is a very large Palestinian Christian population, as well as other minorities. Although there is a shared Muslim identity, different Muslim nations have their own national identity. It is therefore essential, as the majority of the world has concluded, that Palestinians are given their own state and allowed to control their destiny. Again, ending the occupation and oppression of the Palestinians is the quickest and most viable way for Israel to receive recognition by Muslim states.

To the point that Israel makes strong efforts to protect people of Gaza, I have to disagree. Israel uses disproportionate force against the Gazan people and has laid siege to and blockaded Gaza, a place with 1.7 million residents for 7 years. When Israel withdrew troops from Gaza, a part of Palestine, they blocked food, medicine, and money, and after the city was bombed, they refused to allow in concrete and supplies to rebuild it. This blockade of Gaza is wholly counterproductive. Israeli troops can prevent dangerous weapons from entering Gaza while allowing in legitimate food, supplies and goods that allow ordinary Gazans to live a decent life. But all credible and independent reports – for instance the [UN here](#) and the [ICRC here](#) -- say Israel allows in only a fraction of what is needed, and that the blockade of Gaza is a form of collective punishment of the people that clearly violates international humanitarian law and only deepens the popular fury and desperation that leads to more support for hardline groups like Hamas, fuelling more violence. The UN, EU and most governments have

condemned the blockade and called for its lifting, and the United Nations Security Council has passed two resolutions to that effect -- all have been ignored. We do note that Hamas has just offered a **10 year ceasefire** in return for an end on the blockade of Gaza that is supervised by the Palestinian Authority, in coordination with Israel, and the international community.

On the issue of the legality of settlements -- they have been declared illegal by the **International Court of Justice**, and the **International Committee of the Red Cross**. Even Israel's **Ministry of Foreign Affairs legal expert** stated that settlements were illegal in 1967, before the settlement enterprise began. The United Nations Security Council resolution 446 also states, "the policy and practices of Israel in establishing settlements in the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967 have no legal validity and constitute a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East". The EU and many other countries in the international community refer to the lack of legal validity of the settlements and are increasingly basing their engagement in aid and trade with Israel on that position.

As our friends in Israel speak with concern of the breakdown of liberal democracy and a move to the right in their country, the Palestinian leadership, whether in the West Bank and Gaza, have also been engaged in suppressing of Palestinian people. That's why Avaaz is supporting nonviolent activists seeking freedom, an end to human rights abuses, and the democratization of Palestinian politics.

So finally why does this campaign offer hope to save Israel as we know it? Because as the settlements cover their land and their repression looks endless, the Palestinians are giving up on a two state solution. They are preparing to fight a generational anti-apartheid struggle for a single state in which they will be the majority. And then Israel will have to choose between being a democratic state, or being a Jewish one. Either one will be far from the dream of its founders. Extremists on both sides (Including both Netanyahu and Hamas) are the true threat to the kind of peace that reasonable people seek.

If you're an Avaaz member outraged by our campaign, it's possible that you're a very good, socially conscious person that just does not know how awful the Israeli occupation, colonisation and repression of Palestinians has been. We all inhabit 'information bubbles' that shape our perceptions of the world and events. Just in case you may not have had access to some of the facts, here is a great this summary of life for the Palestinian people in **11 images**.

You may be considering leaving Avaaz or may have already decided to. If our values really don't line up, then that's for the best. But if you see every human life as equally precious and deserving of rights, I hope you'll stay engaged, and keep bringing your perspective. None of us have a handle on the absolute truth, and we need to keep listening to each other, and engaging each other, to get it right. Please let us know if there's anything in this message that we really got wrong.

With respect,
Alice Jay
Campaign Director