

Opponent Testimony re Ohio SB 297 Dec. 10, 2024
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Dear Judiciary Committee members,

As an American Jew, I am horrified by my country - the United States - funding and supplying weaponry to Israel, to the tune of many tens of billions of dollars a year, to kill Palestinians and obliterate their homeland. For my government to decree that my opposition to this slaughter and the ethnic obliteration of a people, their culture, institutions, land, livelihoods, and history, is antisemitic is insulting, unconstitutional, and a frightening perversion of truth and justice. It is part of a manipulative and dangerous attempt to silence the millions of Americans opposed to US-Israeli war crimes and crimes against humanity.

As a secular Jew, I was raised with the line from the Passover Haggadah, 'No one is free until all are free.' As part of a family in which our European relatives lost their lives in the Holocaust, I was also taught, 'Never again means never again for anyone.' How dare any legislator or official tell me or others who condemn genocide that we are expressing hatred of Jews?! Israel doesn't represent me or reflect my Jewishness. It clearly doesn't represent many Israeli Jews either. Read for example the moving testimony by a recent Jewish Israeli refuser who was jailed for her refusal to participate in the genocide: jacobin.com/2024/12/idf-israel-gaza-refusal-military.

To quote Jewish Voice for Peace, of which I am a proud member, "Antisemitism is grave, serious, and totally incompatible with movements for collective liberation, and we stand against it in any form. Antisemitism is discrimination, targeting, violence, and dehumanizing stereotypes *directed at Jews because they are Jewish*. In the past decade alone, some examples of the horrifying white nationalist antisemitic violence we have witnessed include the murder of 11 congregants at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018, synagogue shootings at a Chabad synagogue in Poway, California in 2019, Nazi symbols at the January 6, 2021 U.S. Capitol insurrection, antisemitic hate groups and rallies, and the desecration of cemeteries. We have also seen the use of Jewish stereotypes and conspiracy theories as part of racist ideologies. Visibly observant Jews have been especially harassed and harmed."

JVP states that antisemitism must be fought "as part of broader struggles against oppression and for collective liberation. For instance, white nationalist violence has been on the rise in the U.S., fueled by anti-immigrant and racist manifestos, sentiments, and conspiracy theories, such as the 'great replacement' theory. Jews are among the targets of white nationalist violence, along with Black people, immigrants, Muslims, and trans and queer people, among others. Our safety is bound together with the safety of all people, and none of us is free if we aren't all free."

"Attacking Jewish individuals or communal spaces for being Jewish, or blaming the Jewish people for the actions of the Israeli government, is antisemitic and unacceptable and flatly contrary to the values of our movement. Our movement for justice in Palestine

stands firm as an anti-racist movement, which of course includes opposing all acts of antisemitism.”

As a Jew for whom justice, anti-racism, and human rights are primary values, I am anti-Zionist. My in-depth study of history has led me to strengthen this alignment. As JVP explains, “Being an anti-Zionist means opposing the political ideology of Zionism, which resulted in the expulsion of 750,000 Indigenous Palestinians from their land and homes. It means standing against the creation of a nation-state with exclusive rights for Jews above others on the land. Anti-Zionism supports liberation and justice for the Palestinian people, including their right to return to their homes and land. Anti-Zionists believe in a future where all people on the land live in freedom, safety and equality. Zionism suggests Jews require a supremacist nation state to answer the real question of Jewish safety. We believe that everywhere in the world, Jews belong and should be safe. Real safety does not grow from guns, checkpoints, walls and a police state. True safety is built through forging real solidarity with all those fighting for a more liberated world.”

Finally, on the dangers of conflating antisemitism and antizionism, JVP states, “At a time when white supremacists and white nationalists take advantage of this moment to sow confusion and promote antisemitism, Islamophobia, and racism, misstating what antisemitism is harms all of our work for justice and endangers our communities.

“Opposition to the political movement of Zionism and/or the policies of the state of Israel is no different from criticism of any other political ideology or policies of any other nation state, such as the settler colonialism, imperialism and white supremacy at the foundation of the United States.

“But the Israeli government, U.S. government, and anti-Palestinian organizations run concerted campaigns to redefine and misstate the meaning of antisemitism, aiming to falsely conflate it with criticisms of Israel or Zionism. They do this so the Israeli government can avoid accountability for its policies and actions that violate Palestinian human rights.

“Conflating antisemitism with opposition to the Israeli government’s policies or ideology is especially dangerous right now. Supporters of Palestinian rights are losing their jobs, being doxxed and harassed online, being attacked physically, and facing congressional censure for trying to save lives. In fact, the agenda of white nationalists, war profiteers, and anti-Palestinian organizations has nothing to do with protecting Jewish people, and all to do with harming our intersectional movements for justice. Warmongers try to make it hard, but it’s actually really clear and simple: Fighting for Palestinian freedom and against antisemitism are intertwined. We are deeply committed to both.”

I urge you to abandon this racist, unconstitutional, and dangerous legislation. Lives, justice, and our constitutional freedoms of speech, assembly, and religion are all at stake.