



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
14 September 2022

English only

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## Human Rights Council

### Fifty-first session

12 September–7 October 2022

Agenda item 7

### Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories

## Written statement\* submitted by World Jewish Congress, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2022]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **The Unjustified Israel Apartheid Comparison as a Threat to the Security of the Global Jewish Community**

The World Jewish Congress, accredited with the UN Economic and Social Council since 1947, representing over 100 Jewish communities around the globe, is honored to submit this written statement, addressing an issue of imminent concern to our affiliated communities.

Since the UN World Conference Against Racism in 2001, the drive to have Israel declared an apartheid state and therefore treated as an international pariah has been a key focus of anti-Israel activists and organizations the world over. Unfortunately, the United Nations and the Human Rights Council have not been immune to these attempts. This approach does not support a negotiated two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which the WJC strongly supports, but rather seeks to delegitimize the Israeli state as a step towards its eventual dissolution. The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions, BDS, acting as a vessel for anti-Israel sentiment worldwide, has adopted this strategy and is spearheading the Israel apartheid analogy today.

When Israel is called an apartheid state it is compared, most notably, to pre-1994 South Africa. The country was underpinned by the division of society into rigidly defined racial categories, providing the basis of a comprehensive discriminatory and unjust system ranking “racial groups.” The explicitly racist and racially discriminatory nature of apartheid was regarded as abhorrent and was replaced by a democratic system following a global campaign of boycotts and sanctions. In contrast, Israel is a democratic state, where institutional racial discrimination is sanctioned and where all minorities receive equal protection before the law.

Today, the Israel-apartheid analogy is being driven by groups who oppose Israel’s existence and believe that their aim of abolishing it will be achieved through an international boycott campaign similar to that once waged against apartheid South Africa. The Israel-apartheid delegitimization campaign is creating false expectations that international pressure will ultimately force Israel out of existence. This is emboldening extremist factions who oppose a negotiated settlement, encouraging them to perpetuate the conflict, and weakens the position of moderates on both sides who recognize that both Palestinians and Israelis have legitimate aspirations and must find a way to coexist peacefully. Trying to force an apartheid South Africa paradigm onto the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an ideological dead-end that only serves to undermine genuine peace efforts.

The false depiction of Israel as a racist state is part of a broader campaign seeking to delegitimize Israel and turn it into a global outlier. We have also seen that sustained attacks on the Jewish state start a chain reaction of assaults on individual Jews and Jewish institutions the world over and have a direct impact on Jewish communities in the diaspora. The global BDS campaign often puts Jewish communities in a position where endorsing a radical anti-Israel agenda or at the very least remaining silent in the face of vitriolic attacks on the Jewish state is the only way they can avoid being targeted for antisemitic abuse.

Many Jewish communities around the world face an increase in antisemitic attacks after escalations in the Middle East take place, which demonstrates the link between anti-Israel sentiments and antisemitism. Jewish communities worldwide have directly experienced how anti-Israel extremism led to its members, leaders and institutions becoming the targets of threats and verbal abuse, online hate speech, economic and professional boycott campaigns and more, as detailed in numerous NGO reports. Notably, during the May 2021 escalation between Israel and the Hamas terrorist group, antisemitic attacks have seen a rise globally, including physical violence against Jewish people, Holocaust-related chants at anti-Israel demonstrations, and vandalization of synagogues in North America and Europe.

As will be readily understood, the negative implications of this are especially damaging to Jewish communities, including in South Africa, the home of apartheid whose destructive legacy continues to sour relations between people of different backgrounds to this day. Much of the antisemitic rhetoric in South Africa today originates with BDS-affiliated groups who continually seek to poison attitudes towards Jews within the black majority community by labelling them as apartheid supporters. For example, whereas during the apartheid years, resistance groups would chant “Shoot the Boer” at protest rallies, chants of “Shoot the Jew” have been recorded at anti-Israel demonstrations on university campuses. In 2021, BDS-

affiliated groups campaigned for Jewish judges with links to the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the umbrella representative voice of the Jewish community and a World Jewish Congress affiliate, to be rejected as candidates for Constitutional Court positions. Typical of antisemitic slurs through the ages, Jews are portrayed as being a disloyal fifth column working to further the agenda of a foreign state.

In February 1990, South Africa embarked on a new era with the legalization of the anti-apartheid resistance movements, release of political prisoners including Nelson Mandela and commencement of negotiations towards a post-apartheid future. South African society was able to move from an oppressive, discriminatory structure founded on white racial domination to one founded on equality and fundamental human rights and freedoms because its leaders committed themselves to a process of inclusive negotiations. The process was complex and often in danger of being derailed by violent confrontations between rival political factions but succeeded because those representing the country's main constituencies recognized the need to build trust and bridges of understanding. Without denying the painful divisions of the past, it was understood that dwelling on past injustices could not be allowed to distract from the task at hand, which was to look forward to a shared future. By sitting face to face across a table, former enemies grew to know, understand and eventually trust and respect one another. The mere process of discussing the issues face to face was essential to breaking down long-held fears, prejudices and misunderstandings and helping all parties find common ground.

For Israelis and Palestinians, this success story provides a template for how previously divided communities can come together and through a process of honest, constructive and respectful dialogue to resolve their long-standing differences and build a better future. For that to happen, however, all sides must decisively reject violence and have as their shared aim the attainment of a lasting peace. The World Jewish Congress commends all parties who are truly seeking a peaceful resolution and urges all stakeholders to contribute productively to a peaceful coexistence for all.

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