Natan Sharansky

Leadership Talk by the Chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel (2009 – 2018)

There are many faces of the end to antisemitism—and many faces in the struggle. So it's impossible to speak about all the faces. I'll speak about one very important aspect: all the cooperation or coordination between Israel and Jewish communities in this struggle.

First, as the head of the Jewish Agency Organization, which connects Israel with Jewish communities all over the world and helps those who want to make *aliyah*, let me mention a couple of very dramatic figures for Europe.

A few years ago, after an awful terrorist attack in a Jewish school in Toulouse,¹ I was there a couple of times, and it was so obvious that these children would have not been killed if there were minimal measures of defense in place. For example, if the electrical gates actually worked. Additionally, the cameras were fake, and this lonely terrorist who learned all this information from internet came a number of times and saw that it was possible to gain entry, and as a result there was a terrorist attack.

After this attack, we checked and found that the school was too poor to spend money for its security. So the Jewish Agency created security funds for places, and we try to help, and give some minimal help to the communities which need this help to protect themselves. Of course, we are using our network and that of other Israeli agencies, like the foreign ministry, to make sure that we check that the funds which are needed are used correctly. Currently, we are deal-

¹ In March 2012, the Ozar Hatorah school in the northeast of Toulouse was attacked by a gunman who, approaching the school in the early morning, immediately started shooting outside the building and inside. Four people were killed, among them a teaching Rabbi and three children. A teenager was severely injured. The event was called the worst school-related attack in French history and has been perceived as ushering in an era of terrorist attacks in France. Cf. "France Shooting: Toulouse Jewish School Attack Kills Four," *BBC News*, March 19, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-17426313>; "Toulouse Jewish school attack ushered in era of terror for France," *The Times of Israel*, October 1, 2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/marseille-jewish-school-attack-ushered-in-era-of-terror-for-france/>; "Terror Attacks in France: From Toulouse to the Louvre," *The Telegraph*, June 24, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/terror-attacks-france-toulouse-louvre/>.

ing with Jewish communities in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Australia, South Africa, Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, and many other countries.²

More than 60 percent of all the funds go to Western Europe, not to Europe in general. To Western Europe means that they essentially go to the “free world.” I am calling Western Europe the “free world,” since for us in the Soviet Union, we were fighting the free world as a symbol of security, of our defense, of our home. So, over 60 percent of the money, which I raise, (we spend maybe 12–13 million dollars for all over the world), 60 percent of this goes to the security of Jews in the free world. This is an alarming factor since it shows how the situation has deteriorated in the last decades.

***Aliyah* and the Jews of France**

Second, this concerns *aliyah*. When Jews make *aliyah* and decide to go to Israel, of course we welcome them. But we ourselves, we have moved to Israel long ago, from *aliyah* or escape, when Jews after the Second World War were escaping from many different countries. All Jews from the Soviet Union, one million Jews, left after we succeeded to bring down the Iron curtain. Nowadays, it's mainly *aliyah* of free choice. Approximately 30,000 Jews a year come, because they can plan their lives and decide when they want to come. Statistically, usually one-tenth of the percent of Jewish communities in different countries of the free world makes *aliyah*, more or less. Of course it changes. In France, it was more or less two tenths of a percent. In America, it is almost five times that. A few years ago, it started growing very quickly, and soon it reached more than one percent—one percent of different community members moved in one year to Israel. Ever since 1948, it did not happen again that such a large percentage of Jews coming from the “free world” were coming to Israel.

We started studying, discussing, and researching what is really happening with the Jews of France. Our studies show that it's a huge community, 600,000 Jews, while a relatively small population in general is nevertheless a big community for the Jewish people. But starting two years ago, half of the Jews in France began deciding that the future of their children will not be in France.³ It does not mean that they are leaving immediately. We are of course glad that when they decide to leave, their first option is Israel, because there

² Cf. The Jewish Agency for Israel, “2017 Performance Report,” http://lln-websites.com/pdf/Performance_Report/2017/mobile/index.html#p=1, 11.

³ Cf. J. Fourquet and S. Manternach, *L'an prochain à Jérusalem? Les Juifs de France face à l'antisémitisme* (Paris: Éditions de l'Aube: Fondation Jean Jaurès, 2015).

are also Australia, London, Montreal, Miami, and many other places where they could go to. The main point with the Jewish in France is that when they are planning their life, or they are thinking about their life, half of them already decided that the future of their children is not in France. So it is quite a question for the free world and for Europe. And when you study to find out why—right now, and that was my answer a couple of years ago in another study—in France, they feel very uncomfortable. There is Muslim France. There is conservative France. There is liberal France.

Muslim France—so I just want to be clear, the overwhelming majority of those Muslims who came to France, they are loyal citizens and some of the leaders of Muslim France are here and many of their brothers are great partners—but the question is the feeling of insecurity. There are enough cases of killings of Jews. Now, there is a whole generation of young Jews whose religious leaders, Rabbis and teachers in schools, tell them not to go into the street wearing a kippah.⁴ Well, this is not happening in Kiev. It is not happening in Moscow. It is not happening in Budapest today. It is happening in France. So this feeling of insecurity which, especially for those neighborhoods where there is a big Muslim population, is there. Even if you look, and say it again and again as to how good are our relations with majority of Muslim communities in France, this feeling of insecurity remains.

Then there is conservative France, which at this moment tries to say that they have very positive feelings for Jews, but Jews have historic memory, and they remember that for at least two hundred years, for conservative France, the Jew was the “other” in Europe. And then there is liberal France, which was, as many Jews can believe, built by the Jews, was created by Jews, was inspired by Jews, and Jews have filled the government, which today is extremely anti-Israel, anti-Zionist. Maybe, for those Jews who want to be assimilated, it does not matter. But for those for whom their Jewishness is important—and for French Jews it is very important—Israel is very important for them. It is very difficult to always hear someone saying, in the newspapers, in the university, in the bank, what a great guy you are and “of course, you have nothing to do with these war criminals in Israel!” This is uncomfortable, and this is also why the Jews in France feel uncomfortable.

I would say that there is a connection between new antisemitism and old antisemitism. But I think that it goes without saying that there is a connection. Be-

⁴ Cf. C. Liphshiz, “Will Europe’s Jews Stop Wearing Kippahs? Most Already Have,” *The Times of Israel*, April 26, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/will-europes-jews-stop-wearing-kippahs-most-already-have/>.

cause twenty years ago we had a big problem, just to convince anybody that some extreme forms of criticism of Israel have to do anything with antisemitism. Remember when the leaders of the political parties in Europe, especially in Europe, but also in the other places, made a great command: “We are all against antisemitism, but don’t try to stop legitimate criticism of Israel by putting on it the word antisemitism.” And then really we had a challenge—why stop legitimate criticism? Why not stop any form of criticism? Not only legitimate criticism. Every Israeli politician every day criticizes Israel, so why should you be against it?

The Three D’s

The main point to all of these examples mentioned above is the question as to when does it become antisemitic? As a possible answer to this question, let me propose three D’s: Demonization, double standard, and delegitimization.⁵ When, as we have seen lately, the caricature depicting Ariel Sharon eating Palestinian children and the blood of these children is dripping from his mouth, when a caricature like this gets a special prize in Europe, or the guy responsible for this caricature is rewarded this prize—that is antisemitism! It is not legitimate criticism!⁶

When at the first Durban Review Conference, which dates back to 2001, the United Nations was preparing for a big attack on racism all over the world, a sudden twist occurred that shifted the conference’s focal point to one thing—

5 Cf. N. Sharansky, “3D Test of Anti-Semitism: Demonization, Double Standards, Delegitimization,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* 16, no. 3–4 (Fall 2004), <http://jcpa.org/article/3d-test-of-anti-semitism-demonization-double-standards-delegitimization/>.

6 In 2003, an anti-Israeli cartoon by cartoonist Dave Brown was published in the London based newspaper *The Independent*, depicting then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon eating Palestinian children. After a large wave of critique, the newspaper’s editor still insisted on the cartoon being purely “anti-Sharon,” but bearing no antisemitic message. Brown also rejected the charge of an intended antisemitic meaning of his portrait of Sharon. Continuous complaints by the public as well as the Israeli Embassy in UK were rejected by the PCC and the media watchdog. Cf. “Anti-Sharon Newspaper Cartoon Provokes Charges of Anti-semitism,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, February 28, 2003, <https://www.jta.org/2003/02/28/archive/anti-sharon-newspaper-cartoon-provokes-charges-of-anti-semitism>; C. Byrne, “Sharon: Independent Cartoon ‘anti-Semitic,’” *The Guardian*, March 5, 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2003/mar/05/theindependent.middleeastthemedia>.

into choosing Israel from all the nations and taking it as an example of racism, thereby delegitimizing the State as a whole.⁷

Why was it important? Of course it was important in order so that we can speak about it, and so that it will be understood by the world that there is a phenomenon of hating the Jews. I have to say that Joschka Fischer, who was the foreign minister of Germany at that time, helped us a lot to start bringing it into the official definition, first of the Berlin Conference in 2003, when for the first time, it was said that things like some forms of criticism of Israel, demonization of Israel, and applying different standards is also antisemitism. Then the State Department in fact adopted those three D's and today it is almost a working formula.⁸

So it was not only in order that we could speak about it, but it was also very important for the Jews, for the young generation of Jews, who, especially on American campuses, every day hear these awful things about Israel. And even if it is legitimate criticism, all these criticisms of Israel are a new form of antisemitism. Then you feel very uncomfortable with this. Today, with many leaders, they all say the BDS movement is antisemitism—this is easy. But then when you have this in Israel, what do you do? Back then, it was the same BDS, but can you separate yourself from this? Even those who say, “no, I better distance myself from Israel,” can sometimes not separate their criticism of Israel from their attitude towards Jews in general. Statistics have shown that it is only a matter of a very short time of whether you distance yourself from Jewish people as a whole while supporting BDS.

So there are three D's. We could also say, and I would welcome it, three C's or any other letter. But three D's are very accurate, just as you say in English, there are the so-called 3D films. If you look at 3D films without 3D spectacles, you will understand nothing. The moment you put on the spectacles, suddenly you understand. That was the image that I proposed to remember, and it worked for some time. What was the ideological basis of the fact that this attitude to Israel, this new antisemitism became so popular? There was an appropriate ideological

7 A draft document of the 2001 World Conference against Racism (WCAR), also known as Durban I, equated Zionism with racism and made various allegations to delegitimize Israel as a state. Following this, Israel and the United States of America withdrew from the conference and Israel has also boycotted the Durban II and III conferences in 2009 and 2011. Cf. E. Braun, “United Nations: UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance—Durban, South Africa,” *Jewish Virtual Library*, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/durban-i-un-conference-against-racism-2001>.

8 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, “Berlin Declaration 2004,” issued April 29, 2004, <https://www.osce.org/cio/31432?download=true>.

platform, and this was identity. Even at the time of the creation of the state of Israel as a national state, it was very popular idea. Then came cross-identity, multicultural identity and they all said: we don't want identities, we don't want nations, we don't want Europe without religion, without God, without nations, without governments. But without all that, I quote John Lennon, because without that there is "nothing to die for."⁹ So Europe did not want to have a life where there was nothing to die for. Here is this Israel, which insists that today—a part of us— they are a *Jewish* state. And who needs it? We have so many problems, so Israel suddenly becomes the last remnant of colonialism. I remember one of my debates in 2004 with some Jewish human rights activists in France, and I was speaking to them about this new antisemitism. They were saying: "who needs this national state? Who needs national statehood? Once, you will see, all the Jews will come back to France." Well, we know that the opposite happened.

There is clear reaction in the world, which does not want to live without identities. As a result, there are different elections, and there is Brexit and many other things. And all of a sudden, parties appear in France, England, Austria, Germany, Poland, Denmark, Hungary, Greece, who try to go back to the pride of national identity. And, most of them are very far to the right. And for some of them, Israel is the country which survived as a national state. They say, we have nothing against Israel. They say, we love Israel. We have always helped it, we want to learn from Israel! But these Jewish liberal communities, who are so much against us, we really don't like them.

So, after the long period when there were big forces on the left, who tried to embrace Jews, but brought a lot of hate into Israel, we made a big effort to make sure that Jews understand that the relevant liberals and Zionism go together. This concerns especially Jews on the campuses, who are referring to all these so-called liberal friends. And all these people like Linda Sarsour, who is leading a million people to think that Zionists cannot be feminists because Zionism is against feminism.¹⁰ Or also, take Black Lives Matter, which is such a great idea, to defend black people, but still they argue that of course Zionists are racists so they cannot be our members.

Now they have a challenge in Israel to understand that those, who are saying that they love us—and it is important for us to have normal relations, especially with parties getting positions of foreign minister and defense minister and so on

⁹ J. Lennon, "Imagine," song, 3:53, issued 1971.

¹⁰ Cf. e.g., "Linda Sarsour: Zionism and Feminism Are Incompatible," *Haaretz*, March 15, 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/linda-sarsour-zionism-and-feminism-are-incompatible-1.5448822>.

—but they really don't like Jews. Or at least Jews are sure that they don't like them. Then we had some voices, such as the Israeli government, who took a very strong position about the Freedom Party in Austria, and also in other countries.¹¹ We are not going to be different from the Jewish community, but there are serious debates. The Israeli government is saying "look, we have a country to run. We are interested in cooperation. We are interested in the world, in the United Nations. They love us, and after all, maybe their disagreement with Jewish communities is only political." So antisemitism can be found on the right, and on the left—but there is always a disagreement.

Another argument: of course there are some very bad people who are voting for this party. There are neo-Nazis maybe who are voting for them, but it doesn't mean that the leadership of the party is so bad. And today, there was a position of Labor Party in England that wondered how can Hamas members, supporters of terror, have voted for Labor Party. That is really not like the Labor Party. So it is very important, at this moment—it is a very critical moment—to keep this nation when there is no daylight between the government of Israel and the Jewish community.

There are those who love Jews and hate Israel, and those who love Israel and hate Jews; they are partners of this new and old antisemitism. But, it means that we cannot continue like this, saying, let us see what this Freedom Party will decide about their own investigation. I think we have to be practical and that comes with the three D's that we put up a principle and say, here is new antisemitism, but what is not?

The Criteria for Antisemitism

So, what are the criteria for antisemitism—and it cannot be criteria of left and right. What are the criteria which will be acceptable for Israel and the Jewish community together, in order to have normal relations with those parties? I want to propose that there is a reasonable debate as to what kind of commission the Freedom Party has to create. I don't think the commissions are enough—now, we know that commissions take many years to create. We need the answers now! I propose that our attitude to these projects in every country will be that we have to come and work together, Israel and the Jewish community.

¹¹ Cf. H. Keinon, "For Now, Israel Won't Deal with Far-right Austrian Freedom Party Ministers," *The Jerusalem Post*, December 19, 2017, <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/For-now-Israel-wont-deal-with-far-right-Austrian-Freedom-Party-ministers-518447>.

What are we expecting? For example, the leaders of this party are saying that they are absolutely against the Nazi past. There are some members, but okay, let them lead the legislation in the country. They are strong enough to lead the legislation, which condemns this Nazi past.

Second, there are very dangerous legislations in Europe against Jewish communities. They are not called directly as against Jewish communities, but if now Denmark will be prohibiting *brit milah*, circumcision,¹² or in some countries there might be legislations to prohibit kosher meat, *shechitah*, i.e., religious slaughtering¹³—by the way, the pretext always will be either it is against animals, or it is against Muslims, why do you care? It's not against you. First of all, we do care. If it is against identities of any community and I repeat, we are not in this situation to erase any identity. Only if a type of identity is being imposed on others, imposing and aggressive, that's what is dangerous. But living in a community in accordance with your identity, it's only good. It's good for everybody. So let these parties be in a strong position against these laws which do not allow the European Jewish communities to live a normal life. So at least striving for these two demands in the legislation sphere I think is very good.

Now, there are a couple of demands in the programs and manifestos of the parties. Because again they would say incorrectly, so we cannot decide for some of our members, but then who is really leading? These members or you, who is the platform of the party? That the party is the party and everybody who joins the party has to know the nuances of the collaboration that is in it, and it will not support any usage of the symbols of the Nazis. I would even propose that we will expect from these parties all those who are suspected in believing or in being involved with organizations who believe in the Aryan superiority or white superiority, to be put in their platform that they are against it.

One of the leaders of alt-right movement, Richard Spencer, in America recently said: "we aren't against Zionists, I am a white Zionist. I love Zionists. Because of that you are insisting to be different from the others. You didn't mix with

¹² A debate about the necessity of circumcision of male infants with no concern to general health has been ongoing in Denmark since roughly 2014. In January 20, 2014, the Danish Medical Association (Lægeforeningen) issued a document in which they state that circumcision is a mutilation and a violation and should be legally banned. There have been ongoing debates and quarrels for a legal ban of any form of circumcision, both cosmetically and religiously, however, until now, there is no complete ban circumcision. It has been continuously overruled after several protest by religious right groups. Cf. M. Selsoe Sorensen, "Denmark Talks (Reluctantly) About a Ban on Circumcising Boys," *The New York Times*, June 2, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/02/world/europe/denmark-circumcision.html>.

¹³ For a short overview on European efforts of banning religious slaughter see the contribution by Andrew Baker in this volume, 53–59.

the others!”¹⁴ I don’t know by what I was appalled more: by the fact that he said it or the fact that the Reform rabbi whose synagogue it was didn’t know how to answer him. It was so simple, we who are bringing Jews from Ethiopia and who are making such an unbelievable mix from all the races into Judaism—well, of course, Judaism has the broadest sense of conversion—but it has absolutely nothing to do with racism.

So in order that we don’t have a doubt about these stances, put it in the party platform. So I do believe we are now at the stage—when twenty years ago, there was a big fight about how to make it clear to Jewish communities that there are forms of criticism of Israel which in fact are against them, they are antisemitism—today we must make sure, and it’s just in the time that this question is debated in the Israeli government because until now I have to say the Israeli government took a very principled position, but it cannot be position null. It has to be a position: “you say you’re not antisemites!? We want proof!” The proof must be in their behavior towards legislation of their country and their own party platform.

The last thing, we have antisemitism on the left and antisemitism on the right. It is very important that left-wing Jewish organizations will fight antisemitism on the left. Right-wing Jewish organizations will fight antisemitism on the right. Because usually the opposite happens. The left wing is very happy to criticize antisemitism on the right and it’s of no use. Who cares there? And, to the contrary, the right wing is very happy to say, it’s all you, left liberals, that antisemitism is among you. Everybody has to deal with their own camp and be together against our common enemy.

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¹⁴ Cf. S. Kestenbaum, “The ‘Alt-Right’ Hates the Jews. But It Also Loves Them – and Israel,” *Forward*, January 16, 2017, <https://forward.com/news/359889/the-alt-right-hates-the-jews-but-it-also-loves-them-and-israel/>.

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