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Responding to Questions and Disinformation about Israel

As we follow Israel's unprecedented war with Hamas, it's important to know how to discuss the situation with others — colleagues, friends at work or school, parents standing on the sidelines of the soccer field — and to express the deep pain we feel for family members, friends, and loved ones experiencing the horrors firsthand in the Jewish State. This can be especially challenging when we are confronted not with empathy or support, but ignorance or enmity.

Handling these conversations effectively is vital, both in person and on social media. On social media, we must decide if it will be productive to respond to ugly content. Ideally, the goal is to engage in conversation in real life and not via the screen.

Here are some of the comments and positions you may encounter and potential responses to consider.

Palestinians just want liberation from Israel so their land will no longer be occupied.

Responses:

- Israelis withdrew from Gaza in 2005. Hamas gained control of the territory. Instead of investing in schools, hospitals, and civil infrastructure, Hamas invested in its terror infrastructure and in rockets to target Israeli civilians.
- Hamas consistently places Palestinians who live in Gaza in harm's way and uses civilians as human shields, hiding their terrorist cells in neighborhoods where it is more challenging to root out this evil.
- Hamas indiscriminately seeks to destroy all of Israel —not just control their Strip. The terrorism taking place in Israel today is not about forming a Palestinian state. It is about targeting innocent Israeli civilians and wreaking havoc on all of Israeli society.

When you see content online or in-person that is seeking to elicit an emotional response.

Consider beginning with:

- "This post or content is troubling for me. I seek the dignity of all human beings, and this content seeks to demonize and harm Jews and the State of Israel. Can I ask why you would post such inflammable material about an already complicated situation?"

When confronted with negative comments about Jews, Judaism, and the State of Israel that devolve into antisemitic positions.

Consider beginning with:

- Your words are hurtful, dishonest, and have consequences. The comments you are making have devolved into a form of hatred against the Jewish State and the Jewish people. Is that your intent?
- This will provide you with a clearer picture of whom you are dealing with so you can decide if this is someone who engenders goodwill and a conversation.

When you see #FreePalestine from a friend's social post.

Consider saying:

- I saw you posted #FreePalestine, can you share with me what that means to you? I'd like to understand how you interpret that phrase.
- I'd also like to talk to you about what that phrase means to me and why it troubles me, as it has multiple connotations, particularly given the current crisis in Israel.
- FreePalestine, often accompanying the chant, "From the River to the Sea," is a euphemism for the total annihilation of Israel and rejection of a two-state solution. Very often, this term suggests that all land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea is part of Palestine and that Israel, irrespective of its borders, has no right to exist and was created in sin.

Israel is an apartheid and colonial state, and the indigenous population is just fighting back.

Responses:

- Israel is a democracy, where Arab citizens vote and serve in government.
- Jews have a historical record that has attempted peace with Palestinians for decades. Those peace negotiations have failed repeatedly.
- The accusation of Israel as an apartheid and colonial state is an attempt to delegitimize the existence of the State of Israel. Those who utilize these terms, particularly given the horrors Israel and Israelis are facing, are trying to rationalize the actions of Hamas.
- As a democracy, Israel is not perfect. It has major societal challenges. And yet the overriding essence of Israel is to create a shared society between all of its citizens.
- The terminology of "apartheid," "colonialism," and "indigeneity" are used by individuals to suggest that Israel was created in sin and therefore has no right to exist. That is the motivation: To convict Israel in the world court of opinion.

Israel is destroying innocent lives in Gaza – why should these innocents be held accountable for acts of Palestinian terrorists?

Responses:

- Israel has a moral obligation to protect its citizens and to recover Israeli citizens — women, elderly, children, young mothers, teenagers — who are being held hostage by Hamas terrorists in the heart of Gaza. Israeli hostages have been kidnapped, raped, and maimed because of their identity as Israelis.
- Hamas terrorists do not engage according to the acceptable rules of military engagement. There is no ethical approach to their actions. Because Hamas uses Palestinians as human shields, they have made it impossible for Israel to avoid harming civilians.
- Unfortunately, innocent people will die, and lives will be lost. But this is because Hamas is not interested in the value of Palestinian lives, Palestinian dignity, and a future Palestinian state. Quite the contrary

Israel has made living conditions intolerable in Gaza, and its aggression has created the context and circumstances that led to this recent conflict.

Responses:

- Israelis withdrew from the Gaza territory in 2005 and Hamas gained control of the territory. Instead of investing in schools, hospitals, and civil infrastructure, Hamas invested in its terror infrastructure and rockets to target Israeli civilians.
- For decades, Israel has endorsed a two-state solution that would lead to a Palestinian state. Palestinian leadership has repeatedly rejected proposals - from both left and rightwing governments — for two-state solutions
- The Palestinian response should be to negotiate with Israel - not attack civilian communities. Palestinian voices and leadership need to outwardly condemn Hamas and their actions. Any attempt to justify and rationalize Hamas's terror is abhorrent. There is no moral equivalency to what is taking place.
- What is happening in Israel is not equivalent to the unfortunate living conditions Palestinians face in Gaza. The slaughter of innocent Israelis and the documentation by Hamas of these crimes against humanity must be denounced unequivocally.
- Hamas has engaged in a pogrom, attacking Jewish civilians. This is not a military conflict.
- It is possible to be sympathetic to the Palestinians while strongly condemning Hamas and the actions of the terrorists.

There are rallies and organizations holding a "Day of Resistance" and celebrating the "successes" of Hamas, don't they have a right to organize and express themselves?

Responses:

- The organizations like Students for Justice in Palestine, and other pro-Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement groups who back Hamas and their terrorist acts are supporting and praising the killing of Jews. Full Stop. They may claim they are "only" anti-Zionist. But make no mistake — they advocate for the decimation of Jews. They are fundamentally Jew haters.
- Did these same groups celebrate and laud the murders and terrorism committed by ISIS? No, because the victims were not Israeli. Supporting Hamas and their horrors is equivalent in the American context to supporting the Klu Klux Klan.

This is an unprecedented moment in Israeli society. The nightmare unfolding will forever change all of Israel, Israelis, and Jews. Now is not the moment to debate the failures of Israeli political leadership, the missteps of Israeli intelligence and military. There will be a time for that and that must occur to learn and prevent these atrocities from happening again. But now is a time for complete and total support of all of Israel.