How Israelis can fight the Durban conference's Jew-hatred - opinion

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On September 22, the United Nations will waste a day celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Durban Declaration, adopted at the UN’s 2001 [World Conference against Racism](https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/why-durban-iv-must-be-boycotted-opinion-676592), held in Durban, South Africa.

In a just world, the UN would mourn this debacle, for reducing an anti-racism conference into an antisemitic hatefest.

As a preemptive strike, on September 19 in New York, Touro College, CAMERA and Human Rights Voices will sponsor an in-person conference called “Fight Racism, Not Jews: The United Nations and the Durban Deceit.”

Despite the [pandemic](https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/coronavirus-in-israel-new-travel-restrictions-cap-on-weddings-676840), despite the conference being sandwiched between Yom Kippur and Sukkot, despite my having to quarantine for seven days when I return to Jerusalem, I feel honored to be invited.

I will attend as a human rights activist, outraged that – as one African colleague noted – “many attendees preferred yelling about Israel and the Jews than facing the racism issue.”

Durban confirmed many African-American leaders’ fears about the UN’s 1975 “Zionism is Racism” resolution that “racism” would be “drained” of its meaning, reduced to a weapon for bashing non-racist democratic Israel.

I will attend as a Zionist and a Jewish citizen, because too many have forgotten this pernicious conference which reinvigorated the “Zionism is racism” lie and unleashed anti-Israel genies now bewitching some Jewish intellectuals, too.

Most of all, I will fly so far and despite such inconvenience because there’s a particular (unofficial, heavily Americanized) Israeli accent needed in combating Durban and in the broader fight against Jew-hatred.

TWENTY YEARS ago, as Palestinian terrorism revived against Israel, Iranian and Arab diplomats hijacked the UN’s flagship anti-racism conference to denounce “the racist practices of Zionism.”

The parallel NGO Forum launched the “Durban Strategy,” accusing the “Israeli racist system” of “acts of genocide,” and demanding the boycotting of “Israel as an apartheid state.”

Some Durban delegates distributed a booklet caricaturing Jews with hooknoses and fangs dripping blood. Seventeen thousand anti-Zionist protesters rallied, with some waving the banner: “Hitler Was Right!” Other posters wished Hitler had “finished the job.”

In demonizing Israel, Zionists, and “the Jews,” these haters showed how antisemitism and anti-Zionism overlap.

Especially since so many people since this May have swallowed the lies deeming Israel racist, genocidal and guilty of apartheid, let’s use this Durban rerun to repudiate the “Zionism is Racism” charge.

These demonizing, delegitimizing accusations are not fact-based – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is national, not about skin color and not anything like America’s racial conflict.

The charges are bloodthirsty – they encourage calls to destroy the Jewish state and kill Israelis They reek of Jew-hatred, with the Jews – now collectively lumped together in one state – found guilty of the most heinous and unpopular crime of the moment.

The accusers are also hypocritical, making peace harder to obtain, despite their “social justice” rhetoric. If the Israel-Palestinian fight is about borders and land, everything is negotiable, we’re essentially asking “how can we live together?” If, as in Durban, the fight is about opponents deeming Israel racist, apartheid or genocidal, meaning evil, it’s existential, essentially asking “how can we kill Israel?” – making compromise impossible.

From Israel it’s clear: such Jew-hatred isn’t about Palestinians or borders or Left-Right – it’s right-wrong, and it’s about survival. An increasingly vocal cadre of elite American Jews not only calls Israel “racist” and “apartheid,” but tries cleansing these terms of their Jew-baiting pedigrees or their genocidal implications – against Israel. Few Israelis fall for such nonsense.

It’s self-defeating to claim to oppose antisemitism while overlooking one of its most popular forms today – namely, anti-Zionism. Jew-hatred often mutates, attacking Judaism, Jews as a nation, and now Israel, the Jewish state. Refusing to fight Jew-hatred on all fronts is like vaccinating only strangers, not friends, against COVID-19.

An influential minority of American Jews today still view antisemitism through partisan prisms. Durban is inconvenient ideologically. It disrupts the preferred American Jewish narrative treating antisemitism as right-wing. According to the American Jewish Committee, 89% of American Jews recognize the extreme Right as antisemitic, but only 61% “say the same about the extreme Left.” Durban’s parallel NGO meeting, which became a festival of Jew-hatred, with social-justice-seeking do-gooders lustily demanding Israel’s destruction, proves that antisemitism festers on the Left, too.

The new Israeli government is putting politics aside when confronting our enemies. We need zero tolerance for Jew-haters and all bigots. We don’t accept “useful Jew-haters” – conservatives who claim to be pro-Israel yet hate Jews – or “well-meaning Jew-haters,” progressives who hide their Israel-obsession behind human rights talk. Durban showed that fighting Jew-hatred requires clear redlines, broad coalitions and a laser focus, refusing to be duped by side issues or fake friends.

Israel also has the heartbreaking honor of representing the largest concentration of victims of Jew-hatred. They include Holocaust survivors, refugees expelled from Arab and Muslim lands, Russian Jews, Ethiopian Jews, French Jews, and those killed by Hamas, Islamic Jihad, “lone wolves” and other terrorists inflamed by anti-Zionist antisemitism.

Most American Jews recognize – as President Joe Biden does – that anti-Zionism and antisemitism overlap. But many won’t connect the dots, refusing to acknowledge that Israel-bashing at the UN and elsewhere feeds Palestinian violence and rejectionism.

“Antisemitism has grown and continues to grow,” Theodor Herzl noted, “and so do I.” Fighting bigotry diminishes too many, making them pinched, angry, defensive, narrow-minded.

Israelis master Jew-jitsu, turning outsiders’ hatred into binding energy that unites us as a nation. The Jew-haters win when, by targeting us, they exacerbate divisions. The Israeli way is to see your enemy, unite our people, fight like hell, then argue about everything and anything once we’ve handled the threat.