

## WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT ANTI-SEMITISM?

### Counter the core elements of the oppression

The core elements of anti-Jewish oppression are blame, isolation, and terror. Therefore, effective strategies against anti-Semitism must counteract these elements.

One example of an effective, proactive approach occurred several years ago at an anti-globalization conference attended by twenty thousand activists in Porto Alegre, Brazil. A number of groups tried to divert the conference with anti-Israel rhetoric à la Durban, but this time a joint Palestinian and Israeli peace effort triumphed.

The Jewish community of Brazil had been concerned beforehand that anti-Israel groups would dominate the conference. Instead of acting defensively, they had set up a three-day seminar before the conference called “Dialogue for Peace.” The Jewish leadership had marched in all of the anti-globalization rallies. The chief rabbi of Brazil had joined dozens of others wearing T-shirts with the slogan “Two peoples; two states.” Jewish activists had displayed banners that said “Yes to two states. No to racist hatred of Jews.”

At the closing ceremony, a joint Israeli-Palestinian statement was read by both the founder of Israel’s Peace Now and a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Twenty thousand activists stood and wept and cheered. Such efforts are the best antidote we have to anti-Semitism.

### Practice these four specific actions to reduce anti-Semitism

1. Set up groups for Jews to tell personal stories about anti-Semitism, its effects on them, and its derailing of social justice activities.

A useful model from the U.S. women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s was the structure known as the consciousness-raising group. By meeting regularly to share the details of their lives, these groups offered their members a supportive space to discover commonalities and differences in their experiences and to recognize that the personal is also political. We now need similar consciousness-raising groups for Jews on anti-Semitism. At each meeting of an anti-Semitism support group, each member can be asked: What has it been like to be a Jew this week? This month? This year? How have you experienced anti-Semitism today? What was an “aha” moment in your life when you realized there was anti-Semitism?

2. Create a non-judgmental atmosphere in which Jews can examine how they may also act out oppressive behavior.

Because Jews are a traumatized people with a long history of oppression, it is nearly impossible for many Jews to see themselves as both victims and oppressors (particularly toward the Palestinian people). We need to find a way to not blame Jews and at the same time make it safe enough to take an honest look at the oppressive things that are being done to Palestinians. In a safe setting like the anti-Semitism support groups described above, Jews can also explore such questions as: When did you first hear about Arabs or Palestinians in your family or synagogue? What would you have to face if you were to notice the depth of the oppression toward Palestinians and then speak up for the rights of the Palestinian people? The more Jews can find the safety with each other to acknowledge and work through this biased conditioning, the more it will be possible for Jews to build powerful, lasting coalitions with their natural allies.

### 3. Create an allies' movement against anti-Semitism.

Allies are critical to ending anti-Semitism. They can start by examining the hurtful things they learned (consciously or unconsciously) about Jews, review their earliest memories about Jews, and answer some of the following questions: What did you first learn about Jews in your family or at your place of worship? When did you first hear about Jews? What would you have to face if you were never to allow Jews or Israel to be singled out for blame? Allies can then organize together, as non-Jews, to help defeat anti-Semitism. For example, they could make sure that anti-Semitism is included as one of the “isms” listed in a social justice program or march. They can take the lead in speaking up about anti-Semitism. They could also decide to attend a march with a banner, such as one saying “Jews and Allies United to End Anti-Semitism.”

### 4. Welcome a diversity of views on what will bring about a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the present period, much of the confusion and pain about anti-Semitism manifests in conflict about Israel and Palestine. It is necessary—although challenging—to understand the complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We need to stop saying that all criticism of the policies of the Israeli government is anti-Semitic or that those who criticize Israel are automatically against Jews. We also need to take a firm stand against those who believe that Jews who do support Israel in any way should be isolated and not allowed to participate in marches, rallies, or other liberation work. Let's reintroduce the sound Jewish tradition of engaging in dialogue, argument, and thoughtful discussion (with a lot of listening to all sides) in order to increase everyone's good thinking.

#### *A call for unity*

Let us work together with all who are committed to social justice to embrace a commitment to end anti-Semitism alongside all oppression. As a unified movement, no longer vulnerable to the divide-and-conquer politics of anti-Semitism, we will be more effective at fighting for the liberation of all peoples.