

# MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT ISRAEL/PALESTINE

## 1. “A LAND WITHOUT A PEOPLE FOR A PEOPLE WITHOUT LAND”

This central myth of Zionism functioned then, as now, to erase the presence of Palestinian Arab society in the land of Palestine prior to the European Jewish settlement that began in an organized way in the late 19th century. Put simply, the land was not empty. The repetition of this myth serves to erase the direct impact that Jewish land acquisition had on displacing the indigenous population, and to obscure the violence that accompanied Jewish settlement in the land.

## 2. “THE OCCUPATION AND WALL ARE NEEDED TO KEEP JEWS SAFE”

Regardless of the intention to be a haven, Israel remains one of the least safe places for a Jewish person to be (precisely because of the conflict it created by displacing and occupying the Palestinian population). Safety of one population can never, and should never, come at the expense of another population.

The Wall that Israel built in the West Bank is not about security alone. It is not complete and does not prevent the most determined from getting into Israel ‘proper.’ Rather, it is a tool that has been used to entrench Israeli control over the everyday lives of Palestinians who are separated from their land, families and places of work and to seize increasing amounts of Palestinian land.

## 3. “ISRAEL IS THE ‘ONLY DEMOCRACY’ IN THE MIDDLE EAST”

How can Israel be democratic when it holds 4.5 million Palestinians under a seemingly permanent military occupation without voting rights? All people living under the control of the Israeli government, which in effect includes people in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza and the Golan Heights, should have rights to full equality and opportunity to vote for the government which ultimately decides their fate.

Even within Israel ‘proper,’ Israel’s democracy is undermined by the discrimination and emphasis on being a Jewish state rather than a state of all its citizens. Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab and Minority Rights in Israel, has compiled a database of over 50 laws that, in intention and in effect, discriminate against non-Jews, including barring state funding from institutions that talk about the nakba, the violence against and displacement of Palestinians that began in 1948 with the creation of the state, and the law of return which grants special privileges of citizenship to Jews living around the world and excludes Palestinians from returning to their homes.

The far-right government in Israel is becoming increasingly anti-democratic, for example: passing laws that require loyalty litmus tests, undermining judicial authority, approving indefinite detention of migrants, and stripping social security benefits from families of people who commit violent attacks against Jews.

Following Prime Minister Netanyahu’s reelection in March 2015, Israeli journalist Noam Sheizaf put it like this: “For years we have been hearing that Israel will either end the occupation or cease to be a democracy. Could it be that the Jewish public has made its choice?”

## **“ISRAEL HAS NO PARTNER FOR PEACE”**

4.

For decades, Israel has delayed or obstructed constructive peace talks, while continuing to expand settlement building, by claiming it had no partner for peace. Supporters often claim that Palestinians have repeatedly rejected opportunities to have their own state, but to frame those moments as ‘opportunities’ is disingenuous. At every point, Palestinians have been asked to give up their rights to freedom and equality in the land they were born in order for Israel to maintain an exclusivist ethno-nationalist state on their homeland.

The truth is, as even Palestinian Authority senior officials have noted, that Palestinians have no partner for peace. Despite the fact that Prime Minister Netanyahu occasionally pays lip-service to the two-state solution, more settlements have been built under his leadership than any other Israeli leader. Since Netanyahu returned to power in 2009, the number of settlers in the West Bank has grown by approximately 120,000, a number not even including a sharp rise in settlements in East Jerusalem. Israel has no interest in peace. In reality, it has demonstrated that its interest is in maintaining its control over the most amount of land with the fewest number of Palestinians.

# 5.

## **“THIS IS A RELIGIOUS CONFLICT BETWEEN TWO PEOPLES WHO HAVE BEEN FIGHTING FOR CENTURIES.”**

The violence between Israelis and Palestinians is often falsely presented as a conflict between two equal sides with irreconcilable claims to one piece of land. In reality, this is a conflict over territory between a nation-state with one of the world’s most powerful and well-funded militaries, and an indigenous population that has been occupied, displaced, and exiled for decades.

Although religion plays a role in defining the identities of the parties to the conflict, and for some Jews, in justifying their claims to the land, the conflict is not, fundamentally, a religious conflict. This is not a centuries-old conflict, but a relatively recent one which escalated with European support for Jewish settlement of the land of Palestine in the late 19th century and with the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948.

At its root, what is happening in Israel/Palestine is not a religious conflict, nor should it be understood merely as two competing national struggles. This is, and has always been, a case of anti-colonial resistance to violence, displacement, and racism.