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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
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**THE RIGHT OF PEOPLES TO SELF-DETERMINATION AND ITS APPLICATION TO  
PEOPLES UNDER COLONIAL OR ALIEN DOMINATION OR FOREIGN  
OCCUPATION**

**QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL  
FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD**

**Written statement\* submitted by the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ),  
a non-governmental organization on the Roster**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 January 2004]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

### **Zionism: one of the earliest examples of a national liberation movement**

1. As there is considerable confusion and misuse over the terms ‘antisemitism’ and ‘anti-Zionism,’ the World Union for Progressive Judaism is contributing two texts on the subject eighty year apart: one by Albert Einstein in 1923, and a much longer recent analysis by Professor Robert S. Wistrich – with the author’s permission – which he used on 29 January 2004 for an address to a Conference on antisemitism, held in Jerusalem. Our two substantive written statements (1) will be made available for the conferences on antisemitism, scheduled by the European Union in February, and by the Canadian Institute for Jewish Research in Montreal on 14-16 March 2004.

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2. On 6 February 1923, Albert Einstein – shortly after receiving the Nobel Prize for Physics and when he was at the peak of his fame – gave the first scientific address ever to be delivered at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In an impassioned address that testified to his Zionist credo, he declared: *“I consider this the greatest day of my life. (...) This is a great age, the age of the liberation of the Jewish soul. And it has been accomplished through the Zionist movement, which has remained a spiritual movement, so that no one in the world will be able to destroy it.”*

3. Einstein’s prediction spoken a decade before Hitler’s putsch and the Shoah is relevant today:

*“Jewish nationalism is today a necessity because only through a consolidation of our national life can we eliminate those conflicts from which the Jews suffer today. May the time come soon when this nationalism will have become so thoroughly a matter of course that it will no longer be necessary for us to give it special emphasis. Our affiliation with our past and with the present-day achievements of our people inspires us with assurance and pride vis-à-vis the entire world. But our educational institutions in particular must regard it as one of the noblest tasks to keep our people free from nationalist obscurantism and aggressive intolerance.”* (2)

4. In 2003, referring to Albert Einstein’s address at the inauguration of the Hebrew University Prof. Robert S. Wistrich – director of the University’s Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism – wrote: *“the profound words of the greatest physicist of the twentieth century are even more timely today than when they were first uttered.”* (3). Here is his full text:

5. Anti-Zionism and antisemitism’: address by Prof. Robert Wistrich on 29 January 2004

*“The question whether anti-Zionism can or should be equated with antisemitism is one of those pivotal issues which refuses to go away. It is of considerable importance in any effort to define the nature of the “new Judeophobia” and strategies to deal with it. When I had the privilege about six weeks ago of addressing British MPs in the House of Commons, this was the first order of business. Surely, they wanted to know, doubts about Zionism or alarm at Israel’s policies must be distinguished from loathing towards Jews? Was it not true that antisemitism was frequently confused with “anti-Sharonism”, as The Guardian newspaper likes to claim? Did not Jews themselves often engage in the fiercest opposition to Israeli government policy without being accused of antisemitism? Finally, exaggerated use of the Judeophobic charge, it was suggested, might raise the suspicion that Israel’s leaders might be seeking to deflect or even silence justified criticism.*

*My answer to these objections was to argue that anti-Zionism and antisemitism are two distinct ideologies which over time (especially since 1948) have tended to converge without for the most part undergoing a full merger. There have always been Bundists, Jewish Communists, Reform Jews and Haredim who strongly opposed Zionism without being Judeophobes. So, too, there are conservatives, liberals and leftists in the West today who are pro-Palestinian, antagonistic to Israel and deeply distrustful of Zionism, without crossing the line into antisemitism. There are also Israeli “post-Zionists” who object to the definition of Israel as an exclusively or even a predominantly “Jewish” State without feeling hostile to Jews as such. There are others, too, who question whether Jews are really a nation; or who reject Zionism because they believe its accomplishment inevitably resulted in uprooting many Palestinians. None of these positions is intrinsically antisemitic – in the sense of expressing opposition or hatred towards Jews as Jews.*

*Nevertheless, I believe that the more radical forms of anti-Zionism which have emerged with renewed force in recent years do display unmistakable analogies to European antisemitism immediately preceding the Holocaust. One of the more striking symptoms has been the call for a scientific, cultural and economic boycott of Israel which arouses some grim associations and memories among Jews of the Nazi boycott that began in 1933. (Indeed such actions go back at least fifty years earlier when antisemitic organizations first used economic boycotts as a weapon against Jewish competitors.) There are other highly visible manifestations. For example, the systematic manner in which Israel is harassed at international forums like the UN, where the Arab states have for decades pursued a policy of isolating the Jewish State and turning it into a pariah. An offshoot of this campaign was the hate-fest at the UN-sponsored Durban Conference against racism of September 2001, which denounced Zionism as a “genocidal” movement, practicing “ethnic cleansing” against Palestinians. In these and similar public forums, as well as in much of the Western mainstream media, Zionism and the Jewish people have been demonized in ways that are virtually identical to the methods, arguments and techniques of racist antisemitism. Even though the current banner may be “anti-racist” and the defamation is being carried out today in the name of Human Rights, all the red lines have clearly been crossed. There is no doubt in my mind, for example, that “anti-Zionists” who insist on comparing Zionism and the Jews with Hitler and the Third Reich, are de facto antisemites, even if they vehemently deny the fact! This is largely because they knowingly exploit the fact that Nazism in the post-war-world has become the defining metaphor of absolute evil. For if, Zionists are “Nazis” and if Sharon really is Hitler, then it becomes a moral obligation to wage war against Israel. That is the bottom line of much contemporary anti-Zionism. In practice, this has become the most potent form of contemporary antisemitism.*

*Indeed, Israel is today the only state on the face of this planet which such a large number of disparate people wish to see disappear – itself a chilling reminder of the Nazi propaganda in the 1930s. The most virulent expressions of this “exterminationist” or genocidal anti-Zionism have come from the Arab-Muslim world which is the historical heir of the earlier twentieth century forms of totalitarian antisemitism in Hitler’s Germany and the Soviet Union. Even “moderate” Muslim statesmen like Mahathir Mohammad have publicly repeated the classic antisemitic belief that “Jews rule the world” while eliciting virtually no objections in the Islamic world. The more radical*

*Islamists from Al-Qaida to the Palestinian Hamas go much further since they fuse indiscriminate terror, suicide bombings and a Protocols of Zion style of antisemitism with the ideology of jihad. In this case, the so-called “war against Zionism” unmistakably embraces the total demonization of the “Jewish other”; as the “enemy of mankind”, as deadly poisonous snakes, as barbarian “Nazis” and “Holocaust manipulators” who control international finance, not to mention America, or the Western mass media, while they busily instigate wars and revolutions to achieve world domination. Such conspiracy theories sailing under “anti-Zionist” colors is a highly toxic, even murderous world view which today is linked to religious fanaticism and a world-wide revolutionary agenda. The same demonizing stereotypes can however be found in moderate pro-Western Egypt (home to the Protocols-based antisemitic soap opera “Rider without a Horse”) secular Baathist Syria, conservative Wahhabite Saudi Arabia and the Shiite fundamentalist Iran of the Ayatollahs. This is an ideological anti-Zionism that seeks both the annihilation of Israel and a world “liberated from the Jews” – in other words it is a totalist form of antisemitism.*

*The danger has become especially grave because this “annihilationalist” anti-Zionism is spreading under the guise of anti-Israelism and hatred of Sharon to Western Europe, America and parts of the Third World. It has found grassroots support in the Muslim diaspora among radicalized youth and an echo among anti-globalists, Trotskyists, and far Right groups not to mention parts of the media. There is a loose and shifting coalition of red-brown-green bigotry focused against both America and Israel. Osama bin Laden is a hero not only to those who wish to restore Islam’s global hegemony but also for some of those who still believe in the “world revolution” of the proletarian masses or the demise of “Judeo-American” domination.*

*Much of the mobilizing power of “anti-Zionism” derives from its link to the Palestinian cause. Since the 1960s, the PLO has worked hard to totally delegitimize Zionism and this policy has largely succeeded: its anti-Zionism involves a total negation of Jewish nationhood and legitimate Jewish sovereignty in Eretz Israel, a denial of the link between Judaism and the land, or of the existence of the two Jewish temples in Jerusalem. No wonder Israel never existed on any Palestinian maps throughout the Oslo “peace process”. Nor should it be forgotten that the Palestinian Authority has frequently combined antisemitic motifs – including Holocaust denial, updated blood libels and Jewish conspiracy themes – with its general incitement to violence. Not only that, but some Palestinian Christians have developed a “theology of liberation” that plays on older antisemitic efforts to de-Judaize the Christian tradition which finds a sympathetic echo in the West. As for the Islamic groups among the Palestinians, they openly see themselves as engaged in “a war against the Jews”. Hamas, for example, has embraced a fully-fledged Islamicised vision of the “Jewish Peril” derived from the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.*

*Palestinian suffering and Arab “anti-Zionism” has helped to infect Europe with an old-new version of antisemitism in which Jews are rapacious, blood sucking colonialists. The theme is that Jews were alien, rootless and imperialist invaders, who came to Palestine to conquer the land by brute force, to expel or “cleanse” it of its natives. They are the modern “Crusaders” with no legitimate rights to the soil – an alien transplant, absolutely foreign to the region. They succeeded only because of a gigantic occult conspiracy in which the Zionists (i.e. the Jews) manipulated Great Britain and afterwards*

*America. This is a typically antisemitic narrative of which Hitler might have approved - widely believed around the world, even credited by millions of educated people in the West.*

*The popularity of the Protocols today is the one telling symptom of the growing merger between antisemitism and anti-Zionism. Zionism is increasingly depicted in some mainstream media as being “criminal” in its essence as well as its behavior. This flows from the left-wing mantra that brands Zionism as a racist, apartheid, colonialist and imperialist movement, it has revived a stigma that has antisemitic phantoms on a European continent still grappling with the guilt of its genocidal and colonial past. Israel seems to be losing on both counts. Its military actions offer Europeans the tantalizing prospect of saying “the victims of yesterday have become the [Nazi] perpetrators of today”; and/or the opportunity to present Zionism as heir to the darkest pages of Western colonial history – i.e. Algeria, Vietnam, South Africa, etc. Such aspersions are not a priori antisemitic, but through endless repetition they are becoming the ideological rationalization for dismantling Israel. This is the aim of “progressive” anti-Zionism, which, unlike the classic forms of racist antisemitism is not ethnically nationalist or völkisch. But, it is highly discriminatory in its negation of the possibility of a legitimate Jewish nationalism. The antiglobalists either ignore or excuse the terrorism, jihadism and the anti-Jewish stereotypes to be found in PLO nationalism/fundamentalism. For much of the Western Left, Palestinians can only be victims and never perpetrators.*

*On the far Left as well as the far Right, anti-Zionism uses a type of discourse and stereotypes concerning the “Jewish/Zionist lobby”, Israeli/Jewish “criminality” and Sharonist “warmongering” which is fundamentally manipulative and antisemitic. This has penetrated the mainstream debate to the point where 60% of all Europeans regard tiny Israel as the greatest threat to world peace; where over a third of those surveyed in Europe and America regularly attribute to Jews excessive power and influence; where Jews are suspected of dual loyalties by ever greater numbers of non-Jews; and where “anti-Zionist” attacks on Jewish institutions and targets show that we are talking about a distinction without a difference. Anti-Zionism is not only the historic heir of earlier forms of antisemitism. Today, it is also the lowest common denominator and the bridge between the Left, the Right and the militant Muslims, between the elites (including the media) and the masses; between the churches and the mosques; between an increasingly anti-American Europe and an endemically anti-Western Arab-Muslim Middle East; a point of convergence between conservatives and radicals and a connecting link between fathers and sons. Anti-Zionism is much more than an exotic collection of radical chic slogans which survived the debacle of the late 1960s counter-culture. It has become an “exterminationist” pseudo-redemptive ideology reconstructed in the Middle East and re-exported back to Europe with some devastating effects.”*

6. With this grave warning – addressed to the Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights, Members of the Commission, all UN bodies and the international community – the World Union for Progressive Judaism wishes to recall the words that were used in an oral statement 18 years ago (12 February 1986). After referring to the arrival in Israel from the USSR the previous day of the famous ‘Prisoner of Zion’ Anatoli [Nathan] Sharansky – now an Israeli minister – we concluded:

*“Zionism is the struggle for the freedom and dignity of a people who, first in recorded history by their exodus from Egypt, exemplified for humanity the significance of the word “liberty,” a people whose spirituality and striving thus freed mankind from the shackles of bondage.” (4)*

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### Notes

- (1) See also his “Antisemitism in Europe Today”, reproduced in WUPJ’s written statement under items 4, 6, and 17.
- (2) Albert Einstein, “The Mission of our University,” The New Palestine Weekly, 27 March 1923. Extracts published by Robert S. Wistrich, Antisemitism International (Annual Research Journal, Hebrew University, 2003), pp. 11-12.
- (3) Robert S. Wistrich, “Einstein in Palestine,” Antisemitism International, ibid. p. 11.
- (4) Statement by the main representative of the WUPJ (David G. Littman) on 12 February 1986, at the 42<sup>nd</sup> session of the UNCHR (E/CN.4/1986/SR.13); verbatim text in WUPJ, Human Rights and Human Wrongs, N° 1, p. 5.

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(\*) Robert S. Wistrich is Neuberger Professor of modern European and Jewish history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He previously held the Chair for Jewish Studies at University College, London, as well as guest professorships at Harvard, Brandeis and Oxford Universities, and at the Royal Institute of Advanced Studies in the Netherlands. Between 1999-2001, Professor Wistrich was one of six historians appointed by the Vatican to the Catholic-Jewish historical Commission, which examined Pope Pius XII’s record during the Holocaust. He is the author of many highly acclaimed books, including the award-winning Socialism and the Jews [1982] and Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred [1992]. He also scripted, edited or presented several key documentary films for British television, including The Longest Hatred [1991], Good Morning Mr Hitler [1994] and Blaming the Jews 2003. His latest study is Hitler and the Holocaust. [2001]. In 2002 he became Director of the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and is editor-in-chief of its annual journal, Antisemitism International.