

opinion

Maintaining the message of Israel Peace Week

By **Natalie Menaged**
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NEW YORK — Next week, Israel haters again will launch the misinformed and misinforming movement known as Israel Apartheid Week at universities and in communities throughout the world. The good news is that while Israel Apartheid Week claims to be growing, its execution on North American campuses is limited to a handful, and even on those campuses the organizers do not reach many undecided students.

Meanwhile, another student-led movement about Israel will include participants on 75 campuses across North America, and is poised to impact a far larger and more diverse audience. The movement is Israel Peace Week, a student-conceived, grass-roots educational campaign now in its third year.

Created as a pre-emptive response to Israel Apartheid Week, Israel Peace Week has developed into a proactive and engaging campaign that is effective regardless of whether there is anti-Israel activity on a specific campus.

Israel Peace Week revolves around a simple, yet often understated message: Israel wants peace and has demonstrated its willingness to make painful sacrifices for peace. The campaign also outlines options for peace, existential threats to the Jewish state, and the values and accomplishments of a thriving Israeli democracy in an otherwise despotical region.

Organizers of Israel Peace Week employ methods such as interactive displays in the center of campus, cultivating relationships with non-Jewish groups on campus, writing in the campus newspaper, and innovative social media campaigns in order to educate as many of their peers as possible.

In stark contrast, the main thrust of Israel Apartheid Week is to generate support for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, a campaign that calls on universities and individuals to divest from companies that do business in Israel, boycott the sale of goods produced in West Bank settlements, and boycott Israeli universities and professors.

By singling Israel out for censure and advocating for a one-state solution, BDS



is not simply a movement to criticize Israeli policy but an effort to delegitimize the state itself.

A recent study conducted by The Israel Project and the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise indicates that most university students, while knowing little about the issues, are not sympathetic to the idea of boycotting Israel. And when the goals of the BDS movement are explained, opposition to the idea increases significantly.

The arguments that both sides must accept responsibility for creating peace and that there are more constructive ways than boycotting to express concern about a government's policies — dialogue, for instance — resonate strongly with students.

Even before the study, the students who created Israel Peace Week two years ago intuited that their peers could be engaged with messages about peace and how to achieve it. By propagating a solution-oriented message, Israel Peace Week lends wider understanding to the efforts that Israel has made for peace,

and the reality that terror and incitement must be eradicated to bring about a true solution. It is an opportunity for pro-Israel students to discuss difficult topics in a resonant manner.

The contrast between solution-seeking and boycott is sadly mirrored in the Middle East today, of course. While Israel maintains a willingness to dialogue with the Palestinian Authority without preconditions, last September the PA sought to circumvent a negotiated settlement through its unilateral statehood bid. Support for the statehood bid also did not gain traction on campus, while campaigns about Israel's efforts for a negotiated peace were better received.

As the PA enters a unity government with Hamas, which openly calls for Israel's destruction, Israel Peace Week organizers must communicate that this is yet another obstacle to peace.

While the BDS movement may not have wide appeal on campus, it is gaining academic legitimacy, most alarmingly by hosting conferences at Ivy League institutions such as Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania. While the universities have not endorsed the conferences, they are championed by prominent academics on each campus. At Penn, political science chair Ian Lustick, a well-known

critic of Israel, expressed his support while stopping just shy of directly endorsing BDS. At Harvard, conference organizers are planning appearances by Harvard Law professor Duncan Kennedy, Kennedy School of Government professor Stephen Walt and Israeli academic Ilan Pappé, among others.

The TIP/AICE data also indicate that 83 percent of students who have taken a Middle Eastern studies course believed their professors to be unbiased. This perception, when considered in light of growing academic delegitimization of Israel, has serious long-term implications.

Taking both the success of Israel Peace Week and the widening legitimacy of the BDS movement into account, the pro-Israel community must think critically about how to maintain support for Israel among tomorrow's leaders. It certainly seems that the messages of peace and equality are more persuasive than boycotts and sanctions.

How do we ensure that Israel's supporters are more influential than its detractors? As new battlegrounds arise, it's a question that must be considered.

Natalie Menaged is the director of education of the Hasbara Fellowships, a project of Aish International that educates, trains and inspires students to stand up for Israel on campus.

letter to the editor

Thanks to the Vaad

Over the past two weeks, Oakwood Country Club has had the privilege of hosting two kosher events — one, a private celebration and one, a community fundraiser — at which more than 400 dinners were served. We were thrilled to meet the challenge and provide this service.

One of the key reasons we were able to successfully accomplish this to the great satisfaction of our guests is the positive and cooperative assistance of the Vaad HaKashruth. Rather than focusing on why things could not be done, the Vaad's goal was to explore how the menus could be crafted creatively and the food prepared deliciously.

We are grateful to the Vaad's leadership, and specifically to Rabbi Mendel

Segal, Bruce Daniels and Binyomin Mazer for their onsite supervision. Who knows, soon Chicken Tikka Masala may replace chopped liver as a kosher staple!

Chef Mike Storm
Oakwood Country Club

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