

Advocating for Palestinian human rights is not anti-Semitic

Andrew Caddell suggests that anyone who does not support Israel's right to exist, is 'an idiot, or worse, a bigot'—again an attempt to deride human rights advocates and those who challenge the structural disenfranchisement of approximately half of those under its control.



Corey Balsam

Opinion

MONTREAL—In January of this year, Israeli human rights organization B'tselem released a groundbreaking report detailing the ways in which Israel enacts an apartheid regime in all the territory under its control (Israeli sovereign territory, East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip).

The report stressed that there is but "one organizing principle" that lies as the basis for a large number of core Israeli policies: "advancing and perpetuating the

supremacy of one group—Jews—over another—Palestinians."

Juxtapose this conclusion—and everything else we already knew about Israel's abhorrent treatment of Palestinians—with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's glowing praise of Israel and the ties that bind us on the occasion of Israel's Independence Day, Yom Haatzmaut, last week. Canada and Israel are "steadfast allies," united in "our commitment to freedom, democracy, and the rule of law." "Canada," he proclaimed, "will continue to stand proudly with Israel when it is unfairly singled out on the world stage, and we will continue to condemn BDS," the Palestinian civil society-led campaign to put grassroots pressure on Israel to respect their human rights.

For Palestinian-Canadians and the vast majority of Canadians who support Palestinian human rights, this statement was no surprise. Canadian leaders have long expressed such rhetoric. But this statement came off as particularly vexatious.

The Coalition of Canadian Palestinian Organizations expressed it well in its response: "When world leaders express mes-

sages of absolute support to states committing human rights violations, they provide a cover-up for their offences and create a culture of impunity around them that delegitimizes the importance of accountability on the international stage."

My organization, Independent Jewish Voices Canada (IJV), decided to mix it up with a slightly more unconventional response: a tongue in cheek parody video of Trudeau's speech, in which we simply changed the transcription to what we thought would have been more honest on his part.

In response to our video, Andrew Caddell, a regular contributor to *The Hill Times*, published an op-ed called "Israel, with all its flaws deserves Canada's support." Caddell is of course entitled to his opinion, which we obviously don't share. But in making his argument, Caddell crosses the line when he claims that our video included comments such as "(Canada and Israel's) relationship is due to manipulation by the Jewish community." In fact, the text, written in French to match Trudeau's code-switching, said the opposite: that Canada's relationship with Israel is based on the tokenization (or instrumentalization) of ("de" in French) the Canadian Jewish community, i.e., to justify its own strategic interests such as weapons and security contracts. "Notre relation étroite est basée sur l'instrumentalisation de la communauté juive au Canada," is what our video said.

Whether intentional or not, Caddell's mistranslation fits with much larger efforts to unfairly malign and delegitimize those



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, pictured April 13, 2021, posted a video to commemorate Israel's Independence Day, Yom Haatzmaut, last week, but the Independent Jewish Voices Canada was critical of the video's message and ran a parody of it. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

who advocate for Palestinian human rights as simply anti-Semitic.

To top it all off, Caddell concludes by suggesting that anyone who does not support Israel's right to exist, is "an idiot, or worse, a bigot"—again an attempt to deride human rights advocates and those who challenge the structural disenfranchisement of approximately half of those under its control.

Caddell would do well to listen to Trudeau (and Trudeau to himself) in what is perhaps the only line in his speech I can get behind: "It is all of our duty to speak out and stand against anti-Semitism, discrimination and hatred in all its forms."

As a Jewish-Canadian and descendent of Holocaust survivors, I appreciate the sentiment regarding anti-Semitism. But it is an absolute affront to the memory of those who perished in the Holocaust and the ethos of "never again" to utilize the important fight against anti-Semitism as an excuse for supporting apartheid.

I've said it before and I'll say it again: not in my name.

Corey Balsam is national coordinator of Independent Jewish Voices Canada. *The Hill Times*

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