

# **Getting the message out: Media and beyond**

**An introduction**

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[www.connexions.org](http://www.connexions.org)  
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## What are the media?

### Dictionary Definitions:

- 1) an agency or means of doing something, a means of communication
- 2) an intermediate layer
- 3) mass media (TV, radio, newspapers)

Keep in mind:

- Individually and collectively, we are all walking talking media who communicate with other people. Much good organizing is done simply by talking to other people: political work doesn't *necessarily* require using the mass media.
- We also have access to 'do-it-yourself media' which we can use without having to go through the gatekeepers of the mass media, such as: posters, leaflets, buttons, newsletters, videos (YouTube, etc.), podcasts, email, websites, RSS, Facebook, Twitter
- There are alternative media available which take a more progressive approach to issues. They don't reach the numbers of people that the dominant media do, but they are valuable means for disseminating our messages. See [www.sources.com/MNN/CxPeriodicals.htm](http://www.sources.com/MNN/CxPeriodicals.htm) for a list.
- The Internet has partly (but by no means completely), eroded the difference between media relations and publicity. For example, it used to be that if you sent out a news release, it was only seen by the editors you sent it to – and often not even by them, because most news releases end up in the trash. Now, when you post a news release on a media website like Sources.com or CNW, your release will potentially be seen by thousands of people who find it via Google or another search engine, and they may read it months or years after you released it. Media releases have now become public statements as well as communications aimed only at the media.
- Sometimes it is *not* good strategy to seek media attention. Good organizing is often best done without the distractions and distortions caused by the presence of journalists.
- Your own actions may attract media attention, positive or negative, even if you aren't looking for it. The media are always looking for interesting stories, so they may find you even if you haven't approached them. This is especially true if you hold events (talks, films, protests) or post news and comment on your website or via your *SOURCES* media landing page. Given the controversial nature of the Israel/Palestine issue, there is also the very real possibility that certain media (e.g. *National Post*) will be looking for something to discredit those who support Palestinian rights: such a story may be sprung on you with very little notice.

## Who are the media?

In Canada, there are more than 6,000 media outlets:

TV networks and channels (180)	TV stations (150)
Cable TV stations (300+)	Radio stations (700+)
News services including Canadian Press (CP)	Campus radio stations (70)
Daily newspapers (120)	Church papers
Weekly & community papers (1300+)	Consumer & trade magazines (2700+)
Campus papers (200+)	Ethnic papers (c. 600)
Labour papers	Newsletters
Online publications (e.g. Straight Goods, rabble)	
Parliamentary Press Galleries (in Ottawa and in each province)	

Canada's media publish or broadcast in **more than 50 languages**.

See [www.sources.com/MNN/MeLIndex.htm](http://www.sources.com/MNN/MeLIndex.htm) for a list.

American and other international media also reach Canadian audiences via broadcast or Internet. Placing a story in a foreign outlet can also be a way to reach a Canadian (or international) audience. The Israeli consulate occupation in Toronto in January 2009 was covered by Al Jazeera, Xinhua, and Israeli media – they were all contacted when the sit-in was underway, and they covered it.

Some media are key **media drivers**. In Canada: these are CP (Canadian Press), the *Globe & Mail* and the CBC. These are the media other media turn to find important national stories. Getting a story carried by CP vastly increases its chances of being carried by newspapers and stations across the country.

## Who are the people who work for the media?

There are thousands of professional (employed) journalists in Canada, and thousands of full-time or part-time freelancers. Many are members of one or more of:

Canadian Association of Journalists	Professional Writers Association of Canada
Editors Association of Canada	Canadian Association of Broadcasters
Canadian Ethnic Media Association	Canadian Ethnic Press and Media Council
Canadian Authors Association	Radio-Television News Directors Association
Canadian Science Writers Associations	Native American Journalists Association
Canadian Church Press	Canadian Association of Labour Media
Canadian Association of Black Journalists	Canadian Automobile Journalists Association
Writers Guild of Canada	Fédération Professionnelle des Journalistes du Québec

The news media have undergone huge cutbacks over recent decades. In Canada, thousands of jobs have been cut, local TV stations have closed or cut back, local radio news other than CBC has virtually disappeared.

An American example illustrates the trend: At the time of Watergate (Woodward & Bernstein), the *Washington Post* employed around 300 reporters. Today, it employs 60.

These changes have enormously impacted the workload of journalists and how journalism is practised. The days of specialized beat reporters with in-depth knowledge of a particular area and time to dig for a story are almost gone. A typical reporter may work on three unrelated stories a day: the time pressure they work under is tremendous. Display a little courtesy and understanding of journalists' time pressures when you interact with them.

## Gatekeepers

What defines “**the media**” in the sense of the mass media (newspapers, TV, radio, etc.) is that we have to go through **intermediaries** or **gatekeepers**.

Someone else – an editor, a producer, a journalist – decides whether a story is ‘*newsworthy*’. **They decide** *whether* a story gets covered, they decide *how* it gets covered, and they decide whether your point of view is represented.

When you seek media coverage for your issue or event, you are trying to persuade or entice media gatekeepers to cover your story or point of view. And you’re doing it in competition with countless other organizations, businesses, and individuals also looking for media attention.

## Who decides whether a story get covered?

Producers, editors, columnists, commentators, hosts, reporters, and freelancers are all involved in deciding what to cover and how to cover it but editors and producers have the final say.

Freelancers typically have to pitch story ideas to an editor and get them accepted; the editor decides whether to accept the story idea.

While reporters may suggest stories, ultimately it is an editor or producer who decides whether it gets covered and how it will be slanted. Even after a story is written or filmed, an editor or producer may decide to kill the story or to change it substantially.

Editors are hired and promoted because the publisher or owner believes they have good editorial judgement. One important element of good judgement is not running stories the publisher would disapprove of. Every editor knows that, and every journalist who hopes to keep his or her job or get promoted knows that. An example: At the start of the Iraq war in 2003, every editor at every daily newspaper owned by Rupert Murdoch (175 of them) ‘decided’ to run an editorial in favour of the war, supposedly without being ordered to do so. Such remarkable unanimity is no doubt a testament to Murdoch’s ability to find the right people for the job. On the other hand, some media owners give their editors more leeway to include views that the owner may not agree with.

## What makes a story ‘newsworthy’?

A story is newsworthy if an editor or other gatekeeper decides it is.

A judgement about the newsworthiness of a story is obviously not an objective matter. Some might question why Justin Bieber’s new haircut merits saturation coverage while a Palestinian killed at a checkpoint isn’t worth reporting.

Nevertheless it is worth knowing how the media tend to judge newsworthiness.

### Some criteria of newsworthiness:

- Is it timely?
- Is it interesting?
- Is it local or does it have a local angle?
- Is there conflict?
- Does it have drama, emotion, human interest?
- Is it relevant to our readers/audience?
- Is it important?
- The media are more interested in the specific than the general.

Judgements of newsworthiness depend in part on the mandate or target audience, e.g.:

- Local community papers typically only cover news that takes place in their community or directly affect their community. Pitching a broader story to them often means finding a local angle, e.g. ‘local grandmother sails on Gaza flotilla.’
- Specialized papers and magazines cover news related to their field, e.g.:
  - *The Western Producer* covers news related to farmers and agriculture;
  - *The Medical Post* covers news related to doctors and health care;
  - *Chatelaine* and *Châtelaine* cover issues and ideas that are important to women.
  - *Fifty-Five Plus* features stories relevant to seniors;

*Remember: The media want stories, not information or analysis. Always ask: what is the story?*

## What is the media business about?

Most media are business corporations that exist to make money for their owners and investors. (The CBC is an exception but is subject to strong government pressure to be 'business-like'.)

Most media make their money predominately through selling advertising. (Some depend on subscriptions or other sources of revenue, but they are relatively unusual.)

To make money selling advertising means having viewers or readers likely to buy what advertisers are selling. Advertisers prefer consumers who have money to spend, the more affluent the better, creating a continuing incentive for most media to feature content that will appeal to affluent demographics.

Chomsky and Herman refer to advertising as a 'license to do business'. Only those media who receive the approval of corporate advertisers survive and thrive. Those whose 'editorial environment' does not meet with advertisers' approval won't get enough advertising to survive. Media owners will therefore take care to refrain from featuring content that runs counter to their advertisers' interests. They are also wary of alienating influential viewers and readers who are important to advertisers.

## The influence of advertising on media formats

Advertising influences not only the content but the form of the news media, particularly the broadcast media. Modern advertising consists of brief messages with the simplest of content. In fact, almost all advertising contains the same essential message in slight variations.

The message is **"Buy this"**

Typical variants are:

Buy this and you will be attractive.

Buy this and you will be cool.

Buy this and you will be successful.

Buy this and your children will be happy and successful.

Buy this and your dog will be healthy and happy.

These messages are ideally suited to the 'soundbite' structure of modern electronic media. The broadcast media use the soundbite model of news because that's the context best suited for an advertising-dominated media environment.

While this structure works well for advertising messages, it is ill-suited for presenting complicated issues and complex ideas — which is to say, almost all issues and almost all ideas.

In a broadcast news story on a controversial issue, the average soundbite presenting the view of someone involved on one side or another of the issue is **eight seconds**. Under unusual circumstances, a soundbite may be given as much as 15 seconds. That's the maximum allocated to someone to articulate a position on a major issue, be it global warming, the attack of Gaza, social assistance rates, health care privatization, etc.

**Your challenge:** to use a format designed for saying "Buy this" to say "Don't buy the status quo. Here's why."

## Things which need not be said ... and things which cannot be said

The dominant media share certain assumptions which form the invariable background to their view of the world. These assumptions are so taken for granted that those who hold them may not even be aware that they hold them, any more than most of us are aware at any particular moment that we are breathing. They include:

- Capitalism is the only possible economic system.
- What's good for business is good for everyone.
- Private enterprise is better at doing things.
- Growth is good.
- Acquiring things is the key to happiness.
- Everyone has to compete with everyone else and accept economic insecurity
- There is no alternative to the status quo.
- Our political leaders are basically well-intentioned and out to do good, even if they sometimes make mistakes.
- Political leaders who don't belong to our club (our club being the 'West', G20, NATO, etc.), are good when they go along with 'us' but not good when they refuse to go along with us.
- **Divide and rule:** This is not so much an assumption as an approach. The ideological system depends on dividing people against each other, continuously undermining any idea of people uniting on the basis of common interests or values. The media with their built-in preference for conflict play a crucial role in this. In the context of Israel/Palestine, this means portraying Jewish Israelis and Palestinians as having inherently irreconcilable interests. The idea that everyone would benefit, for example, if they lived in a state where all had equal rights, is almost totally absent from the dominant discourse.

There are also certain things which cannot be said. Since the dominant media are capitalist corporations who make their money from advertisers whose message is "Buy This", no media corporation can make itself the vehicle for a message that repeatedly and consistently says "Stop Growth – Stop Capitalism – Save the Planet". Calls for economic boycotts will almost never be given media coverage, and most media refuse to run even paid ads for 'Buy-Nothing Day'. Even targeted boycotts with a very specific rationale, like the call to boycott firms that profit from the Israeli occupation, meet resistance, not only because they target Israel but because they run counter to capitalists' instinctive hostility to boycotts.

The media's dominant assumptions define the limits, and challenges, of trying to use the mainstream media to communicate a radical message.

Nevertheless, despite these underlying assumptions, keep in mind that the individual reporter you are dealing with may be genuinely open and receptive to new ideas. Treat them with respect and present your ideas as honestly and persuasively as you can. The ordinary reporter is not the same as the corporation that owns the media outlet s/he works for. They can be educated and influenced.

The image of the media as neutral and open means that a certain amount of dissent is permitted and even welcomed to create the appearance of diversity. This means alternative information and ideas and critical points of view can leak into the mainstream media from time to time.

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*"It makes sense to keep a realistic grasp of the factors that limit and distort the media product, while at the same time recognizing the many opportunities the media offer to introduce new perspectives and understanding. Many fine journalists, commentators, and activists have shown how much can be achieved with dedication and commitment."*

- Noam Chomsky

## Things that can (maybe) now be said

For a long time, Israel/Palestine issues have been protected by an “electric fence”. The media, especially in North America, have historically been extremely wary of printing or broadcasting stories critical of the Israeli state, let alone of taking a consistently critical stance.

While this is still true, it is not as true as it used to be: this has been one of the victories of the international solidarity movement over the past few years.

The pro-Zionist organizations are well aware of this fact, and it is of great concern to them. They see that their previously almost-unquestioned hegemony over the media’s framing of the Israel-Palestine conflict has eroded significantly, and they are floundering as they try to figure out what to do about it.

For those of us who support a solution based on justice and human rights, this means that doors that may previously have been closed may now be at least partially open. There is less of a media taboo, and as a result more positive stories are getting into the media. Each story that gets in lessens the taboo even further.

## Media Strategy

Getting media coverage is not a one-shot thing, any more than working for social justice is a short-term commitment. If the media are part of our strategy for change, we need to work on media relations consistently and strategically.

A media strategy includes thinking about what we want to gain from media coverage and which media we are most interested in reaching. Will we aggressively pursue media attention, or will we simply make ourselves available to respond to media calls?

Most people get their news from the mainstream media. The mainstream media reach huge numbers of people. If we want to reach those people, we need a strategy that realistically assesses the limitations and opportunities of using those media.

Poorly planned and executed public relations may just result in not getting publicity, but it can also result in getting bad publicity.

Messages have to be repeated over and over again to get through. Effective lobbying organizations, (e.g. right-wing think tanks) send out their messages countless times in many many different formats. Successful advertisers plan campaigns to drive a message home, and after one campaign is finished, it is followed by another, so that the brand or product or company remains prominent.

Important as planning is, it’s also important to be an opportunist in the sense of being able to respond quickly to changing circumstances and taking advantage of opportunities that present themselves. Circumstances sometimes have a way of sweeping aside even the best-laid plans in not much more than an instant. If we base ourselves on a clear vision and clear principles, we’ll be equipped to adjust our plans and strategy.

You may know the old question: ‘What’s the best time to plant a tree?’ The answer is “20 years ago”.

The same wisdom applies to building up your media profile: the best time to do it is well before you need media attention. Work at creating materials (e.g. media kits, FAQs, backgrounders) which can be provided to the media when needed. Try to interact regularly with the media, even if only by issuing news releases, so they know your track record and positions. Always be professional and polite in dealing with journalists: they are not your allies, but they are not your enemies either. They too can and should be educated about the issues, and courteous clear communication helps to accomplish that.

When planning your media strategy, spend some time critiquing your existing publicity materials and efforts. Are they effective? How could they be improved?

## Hooks

A hook is a way of pitching the story in a way designed to interest the media. Essentially this is the feature or aspect of the story that you use to entice or persuade the media, or selected media, to cover it. If we want to use fishing metaphors, we might actually want to call it the ‘bait’. But ‘hook’ is the established term. Sometimes your hook may be a staged event or a gimmick.

Ask yourself: why would the media want to cover this story? What about this story is newsworthy from the point of view of a media gatekeeper? What makes it interesting or noteworthy?

You may have one hook for the story, or you may have more than one, aimed at different media. For example, for a local newspaper, your hook might be the involvement of a local resident in the story. For a senior’s publication, it might be how the issue affects seniors. For a health-related publication, you might pitch the health impacts of the issue. The story is essentially the same, but you may want to vary the headline and first paragraph, at least, to customize it for the particular medium you are contacting. Consider the local angle to national stories and the national implications of local stories.

For example, a news release about the Gaza flotilla might consist of a standard description of the flotilla, the reasons for it, what it is doing, who is on it, etc. This general release could then be fine-tuned by adding one or two paragraphs at the top, along these lines, along with references to online articles and websites where more in-depth information is available.:

- A release aimed at farm publications could include a couple of paragraphs about the plight of farmers in Gaza and in Palestine generally: how their land is being seized, how settlers and the military destroy their trees and crops, etc.
- A release aimed at commercial fishers’ publications could talk about how fishermen in Gaza are prevented from going out to sea to catch fish.
- A release aimed at disability-rights publications could talk about Israel’s refusal to allow batteries for wheelchairs and hearing aids into Gaza.
- A release aimed at health publications could talk about the health crisis in Gaza caused by lack of access to medical care, lack of access to drugs, etc.
- A release aimed at student publications could describe the obstacles that prevent students in Gaza from getting an education, including the fact that Israel bars them from going to study abroad.
- Local publications could be targeted if a member of the local community is participating in the flotilla.

These are just examples: the idea is to be creative in targeting while still using mostly standard content without having to write a totally separate release each time.

It is worth keeping in mind that “niche” publications collectively reach huge numbers of people, and that they often have fewer obstacles in the way of accepting a story.

## Media Releases (News Releases)

- Make it short, preferably one page. (Exceptions: when dealing with a complicated issue involving statistics or when responding to allegations or correcting the record, when more detail is required.)
- Use clear ordinary language.
- A media release parallels the structure of an actual news story.
- It must have a **catchy headline** that draws the reader in
- The first paragraph summarizes the basic message of the release.
- Be concise, especially in the headline and first sentence. You are writing to appeal to media professionals who specialize in four-word headlines and eight-second soundbites. Write in the active voice. Use short sentences (maximum 18 words). What you have to say must jump off the page if you are going to make it past the first glance.
- Use word pictures (“children without wheelchairs” rather than “negative health outcomes”).
- Include quotes. Support the points made in the release with quotations from people who are knowledgeable about and/or affected by the problem. Quote members of your organization rather than baldly state your views. Rather than say, “the blockade of Gaza is a crime which has to end”, say “According to Heather Jones, ‘the freedom flotilla is a way to bring urgently needed aid to the people of Gaza and to at the same time call on all governments to take action to end the illegal blockade of Gaza’”.
- Include the Five W’s and Two H’s: Who, What, When, Where, Why, How, How Much.
- Avoid acronyms. Spell out terms and names in full.
- Avoid leftist jargon, which alienates people who are not already inside. I suggest avoiding talking about “isms” such as “colonialism”, “Zionism”, “racism”, etc. as much as possible. *Describe* what is actually happening and use *examples* to show what is going on, rather than *labelling* it.
- Make it clear who the release is coming from. Make sure it has the date. Include the name or names of people in your organization who can be reached before and after office hours. One unanswered phone can “turn off” a reporter on a bad day.
- Pay attention to the appearance of the release. It should look clean and well laid-out. Don’t cram text onto the page. Vary the length of paragraphs, but keep them all relatively short.
- The major media receive hundreds of news releases a day. Most of them end up in the garbage. Make sure yours doesn’t by making it interesting, informative and professional.
- If you have useful or essential background material, send it as a separate document with its own headline clearly distinguishable from the release itself. If sending your release by email, never send attachments: most media email accounts block attachments. Instead, put a link in your email to the location on the website where the document can be found.
- In some instances, you may want to do more than one release with different slants for different media. (See above under “Hooks”.) For example, a release questioning the safety of a pesticide may lead with the risk to consumers when sent to consumer health publications, but may lead with the danger to the farmers who apply it when sent to farm publications. Both releases will make essentially the same points (you certainly don’t want to be found to be sending out conflicting messages) but they may make those points in a different order, and may elaborate more on one aspect in one release, and more on another point in a second release.
- If possible, consider making your release available in more than one language to widen the potential audience. In Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver especially, there are many ‘ethnic’ papers with substantial circulations. Some of them are also more open to stories with a progressive slant than the mainstream corporate media. Many ‘other-language’ media do accept releases in English, but if it is in their own language, they are more likely to use it. Being often pressed for time and content, they may use a release ‘as is’ as a story, if it is already in the language they publish in.

## Distributing your media releases

- Ask: who is your target audience? Which media reach your target audience(s)?
- **Media Lists:** Unless you are interested in a very limited number of media outlets, it is more cost-effective to buy a media list than to create and maintain your own. Maintaining a media list of any size is insanely time-consuming. For \$109.95 a year you can get a copy of the *Media Names & Numbers* print directory plus access to the online database. See [www.sources.com/MNN/](http://www.sources.com/MNN/)
- Your own media contacts: There may be some media outlets who consistently show interest in your organization or cause. You may have direct relationships with a few journalists and editors. There likely won't be a lot of them, but you will want to keep track of friendly media and journalists, and contact them directly when a story comes up.
- Don't forget community media, ethnic media, special-interest & niche publications, student papers, etc.
- Always include Canadian Press (**CP**) on your list if you have a story that you think merits national coverage. Most of the major media in the country subscribe to CP, so getting your story picked up by CP will land it in newsrooms across the country and increase the odds they will run it too.
- News releases can be distributed in a targeted way or in broadcast way. An example of a targeted release might be one that deals with an issue specific to a particular geographic location where you only want to reach the media that serve that location.
- Means of distributing news releases include **fax, email, news release services**, and your own **website**.) Sending releases by mail is too slow, and courier is too expensive. Hand delivery is feasible if you are in a small town with only a handful of media outlets.
- You can also phone selected media to inform them of an event that you'd like them to cover. Phoning is the best means of making contact or following up on a release, but you can only phone a small number of journalists directly, whereas you can send a release to a large number.
- It is tempting to use email because it's easy and free, but the disadvantage is that a significant proportion of your emails never arrive at their destination because they are blocked by spam filters, and of those that arrive, many are deleted without being read.
- **Fax is more reliable** and more likely to reach its destination. For most media outlets, one fax to the main news fax number will suffice. However, for the CBC it is necessary to send individual faxes to each program you want to reach, because each program has its own number and its own producers who make decisions about what stories to cover.
- **Your own website:** You should post your news release on your own site, and maybe on your Facebook page if you have one, but it won't likely reach a lot of media on its own.
- **News release services** will post your release on a media website and will also send them out via a feed that the media subscribe to. *SOURCES* ([www.sources.com](http://www.sources.com)) charges an annual fee starting at \$288 per year which allows you to issue as many releases as you want. CNW and BusinessWire charge on a per-release basis, the cost of a single release is typically \$300 – 700.
- **RSS:** A means by which releases (or other content) are fed into a 'newsfeed' which people (such as journalists) can subscribe to individually, usually based on content criteria (e.g. a user may subscribe to stories about alternate energy or wind energy). RSS feeds also go to aggregator sites which accumulate the content of thousands of individual feeds, allowing users to search the aggregator site for content.
- **Google** and other search engines: Google, Yahoo, Bing and other search engines are means by which your news release can quickly become visible to people who aren't on your list. When your release appears on a news release website like CNW or *SOURCES*, the release will show up in Google's results within an hour.
- **Websites** that deal with your issue: Don't forget to send your release to relevant websites and organizations. They may post it, and then users of that site (journalists or the general public) may then find it there. For a partial list of websites concerned with Palestine and Israel, see [www.connexions.org/Groups/CxGHd8340.htm](http://www.connexions.org/Groups/CxGHd8340.htm) and [www.connexions.org/Groups/CxGHd16515.htm](http://www.connexions.org/Groups/CxGHd16515.htm)

## Interviews and contacts with the media

- An interview may be by phone, or it may be in-person. A reporter may be calling to interview you then and there, or they may be calling to set up an interview later. Clarify this at the beginning of the call. Remember that everything is on the record from the moment you start talking. If you are being approached by a radio talk show, the initial call may be a pre-interview to see if you'd make a good guest.
- Respond to media calls promptly. Being helpful with journalists won't guarantee that they'll cover your story, but being unhelpful, failing to return calls on time, missing deadlines, etc., will make it much less likely they'll cover it.
- If you have sent out a media release, you have to have a spokesperson available for interviews. Many organizations list two or three spokespeople to ensure a journalist will be able to reach someone.
- If you are listed as a media source, e.g. in a media release, or in *SOURCES*, or on your own website, it is important you return calls promptly. Reporters will quickly move on to another source if they can't reach you.
- If a reporter calls you unexpectedly (i.e. not as a result of you having sent out a release, but because they've found you listed as someone involved in an organization or issue), take the time to ask a few questions and take notes: What paper/station are they with? What is the story they are working on? What angle are they approaching it from? What is their deadline? Do they want to do the interview now, on the phone, or do they want to do it on location or at the studio? How long will the interview last? Are they referring to a report or document? Can you provide them with your own documentation? If they want to do the interview immediately, on the phone, you may wish to say that you are in the middle of something and offer to get back in 15 or 20 minutes. This gives you an opportunity to prepare while respecting their deadline. Be helpful but cautious: some journalists (e.g. those working for the *National Post*) have their own agenda, and you don't want to talk to them without having a chance to catch your breath and prepare.
- Always call back. If you believe you are not the best person to do the interview, say so, and suggest an alternative if possible.
- Make sure you are well researched and prepared on the factual and analytical background of your subject matter. You may be nervous and prone to forget things during a media interview; it helps to have thoroughly mastered your subject matter. Be familiar with recent developments and recent news stories about the subject. You don't want a reporter who has done his or her homework to have the advantage over you by being better prepared than you are.
- Remember that journalists are doing the work they do to make a living. They aren't doing it because they are in favour or opposed to your cause. Your relationship to them is a professional or business relationship, not a personal relationship.
- Don't automatically judge reporters by who they work for. The fact that a reporter works at a particular publication or station of which you have a low opinion does not necessarily mean that s/he shares the agenda, standards, or viewpoint of that publication. Reporters get jobs where they can while waiting for something better to come along. Give them the benefit of the doubt, while not naively assuming the best.

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*“Success in getting your story across in most Canadian mainline media today depends mainly on how well your story fits with the media’s pre-judgments about what is, and what matters. These pre-judgments in the final analysis mainly serve the status quo. They do not necessarily -- in fact do not usually -- square with historical accuracy or relevance, social responsibility, justice, scholarly analysis or logic. Therefore anyone or any organization with ‘idealistic’ or ‘oddball’ ideas that threaten the status quo faces a series of filters and outright blockages. Notwithstanding this uphill nature of gaining media access it is a grave error of intellect and attitude to consider the situation hopeless or monolithic.”*

*- Barrie Zwicker (Sources Publisher 1977 – 1999), Selected Tips for Getting Your Story Across in the News Media, November 1985*

## Preparing for the interview

- Plan your key message points. (See also “Frames”) Write them down and rehearse them out loud. These are your “aces” which you must play during the interview.
- Think in terms of quotes and headlines.
- A news interview may last five or ten minutes or longer, so you must be able to speak articulately and in some depth about the issue if you are going to do an interview about it.
- Out of that interview, a typical TV news story will only use one clip lasting 8 to 15 seconds. **You must be able to articulate your key message in that time.** A print story will use quotes from you of comparable length.
- Be clear in your own mind about who your audience is. **You are speaking through the journalist to your real audience, i.e. the public,** or some particular section of the public.
- If possible role-play the interview with a member of your organization. Think of tough questions you may be asked and practise how you will answer them.

## During the Interview

- An interview is not a conversation. It is a structured ritual with definite rules. Make sure you understand the game and how it works. Always remember you are talking to a journalist.
- Make sure you say what you want to say and nothing else. Don’t be drawn into saying something you don’t want to say. Nothing is off the record.
- Make sure everything you say is true and can be backed up. Don’t guess at answers or make up ‘facts’ on the fly. One incorrect statement or unsubstantiated opinion can undermine your whole message.
- Listen carefully to each of the reporter’s questions. Questions which seem to be off base can be a sign that the reporter doesn’t really understand the topic. If you detect this, expand more on your answers and give more context so the reporter gains a clearer understanding.
- Be calm, authoritative, and present your case. At the same time, show that you care about the issue and explain why you care.
- Use examples to illustrate your point.
- Don’t let yourself be drawn into arguments or irrelevancies.
- Respond to emotionally loaded issues and questions with sensitivity. Don’t dismiss the misfortunes of others.
- Avoid direct attacks on your opponents. Criticize policies and actions, not individuals. You’ll come across better if you seem calm and reasonable rather than loudly angry.
- If you find yourself under attack (rare, but it can happen) respond calmly and rationally. The audience will side with the polite calm person who is under attack.
- Don’t let the questioner put words in your mouth, and don’t repeat incorrect formulations when responding to them. If the interviewer asks “Won’t the policies you propose cost thousands of people their jobs”, don’t reply by saying “No, it won’t cost thousands of people their jobs”. That just sets you up for a headline that says “Environmentalists deny thousands of jobs to be lost”. A better response might be “Our policies will lead to increased employment opportunities while protecting our environment for future generations.”
- Don’t be drawn by silence. A common technique in studio interviews is for the interviewer to remain quiet to see if you start to ramble to end the silence. If this happens, simply remain quiet, smile, and look expectant until the interviewer asks the next questions.

## Problem questions

- Question states a false premise
  - Don't nod in response to the question. It looks like you're agreeing.
  - Calmly state why the premise is false. "I wouldn't say that" or "the way I'd put it is."
- Hypothetical questions
  - Don't speculate
- Multiple question
  - Pick the aspect of the question you want to reply to, and reply to that.

## Bridging

Bridging is the art of moving from a topic or question that you don't like to one that you do like. If an interviewer is leading the interview in a direction that you think is unhelpful, bridging is your technique for steering the interview back to the important points that you are trying to communicate.

There are several techniques for bridging from a question that contains incorrect assumptions or that is going off the issue as you see it.

- Refocus: "The real issue is"
- False 'either-or' premise
  - "Neither... the issue is..."
- Refocus on the large picture: "The big picture is..."
- Give an example: "One example of this is..."

For activists, bridging involves not only bridging from an off-track topic to the issue you want to talk about, but also bridging from the status-quo assumptions contained in the question to different assumptions. In other words, you are trying to shift the frame.

- "This benefits the rich at the expense of working class people and the poor."
- "This violates the basic principles of democracy. You can't make people second-class citizens because of their religion or ethnic background."
- "We believe in a democratic state with equal rights for everyone. No one should be discriminated against because of their religion or ethnic origin."

## Op-Eds

- Op-Ed articles are articles printed on the page in the newspaper across from the editorial page. Many newspapers accept outside submissions for these pages.
- Length is typically 700 – 1000 words.
- Inquire first (usually there is an op-ed editor) to see whether they would be interested in your article.
- An op-ed can be a good way to set out your views on an issue in greater detail – and you get to write it, although the editor may ask for changes.

## Letters to the Editor

Writing letters to the editor is an effective and inexpensive way of getting publicity for your point of view.

Letters to the editor are published by almost all publications, from newspapers and magazines with a national circulation, like the *Globe and Mail* and *Maclean's*, to community newspapers, special-interest magazines, trade publications, and newsletters.

A letter to the editor may not have the glamour of splashier forms of media exposure, but the letters pages are among the most widely read sections of almost all periodicals.

### Guidelines for writing a letter to the editor:

- Make it brief. 100 to 150 words should usually be the maximum. (Smaller papers may print longer letters because they don't get as many.)
- Confine yourself to one subject. Make one point and make it clearly. You or your organization undoubtedly have views about many issues, but in a letter to the editor, you've can make one only point effectively.
- To help you focus your letter, summarize the point you are trying to make in a single phrase or sentence before you begin writing the text of your letter. This is your "message point." Use this to guide you in writing the letter.
- You can and should bring in supporting evidence and arguments, but they should all be in support of your main point. Don't digress.
- Your main point can be specific or broad, e.g. "The proposed landfill site will pollute Otter Creek" or "If we don't stop overfishing, the world's oceans will become deserts".
- If possible, have someone else read or edit your letter before sending it off. It's hard to judge one's own writing objectively.
- If you are writing on behalf of an organization, make it clear that you are speaking on its behalf. However, be aware that newspapers tend to favour letters from individuals over letters from organizations, unless the organization is responding to an attack on the organization itself.
- Avoid personal attacks or disparaging the motives of someone you disagree with. Stick to the issue and the facts.
- Send your letter off quickly, while the issue is fresh, preferably the same day. The chances of your letter being printed diminishes the more time goes by.
- Fax your letter, or send it by E-mail, or deliver it by hand. Sending it by mail may delay its arrival by two or three crucial days (more when postal workers have been locked out by management!)
- Remember to include your name, address, and phone number with the letter. Many publications have a policy of contacting the letter writer to confirm that s/he is truly the author of the letter.

## Frames & Framing

For each story you need to identify the ‘frame’ for the issue as you see it. This defines **the essence of the issue as you see it: how you want people to see the issue.**

In framing an issue you may have to counter the way the media currently tend to frame the issue, e.g.

The media often frame environmental issues in terms of “**jobs vs. environment**”,

i.e. if you act on environmental concerns, you are costing people jobs.

You may want to frame it as “**sustainable green economy = more and better jobs.**”

A common frame for Israel/Palestine issues is “**Israel has a right to exist as a Jewish state**”.

You might want to frame your approach as “**a democratic state with equal rights for all**”.

In proposing an alternative frame, you want to avoid referring to the existing frame directly.

If you refer to it directly, you can end up reinforcing it. For example, if you are asked “Don’t you think Israel has the right to exist as a Jewish state?”, don’t use the term “Jewish state” in your reply.

Say something like: “We believe that everyone should have the same rights, regardless of their ethnic background or religion.”

Another obstacle you have to contend with is the ‘soundbite’ nature of the electronic media in particular. News is presented as a series of unrelated events that happen every day. Much of it is focused on individuals and their problems: crime victims, accident victims, celebrities, etc. The very nature of the news business excludes context. News tends to ignore background and relationships.

As much as possible, choose positive solution-oriented frames for your messages. When you just tell people how bad things are, or what you don’t like, you tend to turn them off. Positive messages get more response. Being in favour of democracy and human rights resonates with most people more than being ‘anti-Zionist.’ The dominant discourse already tends to portray the problem as insoluble because Palestinians and Jewish Israelis can’t get along and have irreconcilable interests. Using “anti” terminology reinforces that frame. Using positive frames like “equal rights for everyone” challenges the dominant frame.

*Israelis:* We tend to use the word “Israelis” when we are actually referring to Jewish Israelis. Even though our intentions are good, there is a danger in using the terminology of “Palestinians and Israelis” when we actually mean “Palestinians and Jewish Israelis” because it tends to obscure the fact that about one-quarter of Israelis are not Jews. We may therefore be unintentionally reinforcing the frame that Israelis = Jews rather than Israelis = citizens of Israel.

Remember that many people (not just the media) have deeply held preconceptions that make them instinctively resistant to a new way of looking at things or even looking at evidence that challenges their preconceptions. The dominant assumption that no real change is possible can make proposed alternatives or solutions seem unrealistic or impossible. This is true generally, and it is certainly true in relation to Palestine/Israel, where the predominant assumption is that there is no alternative to occupation and apartheid.

Learn from the right, who are much better at framing issues than the left. (Of course, they also benefit from favourable coverage in the media, which they largely own, and vastly greater financial resources.) The right uses terms like “tax relief” to evoke the image of rescuing hard-working people from excessive taxation. This brings them support from people who would not support a program of “tax cuts for the rich and increased costs for everybody else”.

**Deciding how to frame issues is not just a media relations task but a key challenge for developing strategies for social change.**

## Questions & Objections: Examples of Framing

*Here are some examples of questions and objections and some possible suggestions for ways in which responses might be framed. It might be worthwhile to spend time brainstorming and discussing ways of responding to typical questions.*

*Why do you single out Israel?*

We don't. We believe that denying people basic human rights because of their ethnic origin or religion is unacceptable anywhere, anytime. We don't think Israel should be allowed to get away with human rights abuses that we condemn when they take place in other countries.

*Why don't you condemn Syria – Sudan - Saudi Arabia – China – Uzbekistan - Belarus – etc.?*

The mandate of our organization is the situation in Israel and Palestine. As Jews, we believe we have a special responsibility to speak out against the actions of the Israeli government, which falsely claims to be acting in the name of all Jews. We do not have the resources of large organizations like Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch which cover the entire world, but we do have clear principles, which state that denying people basic human rights because of their ethnic origin or religion is unacceptable anywhere, anytime.

*Isn't criticism of Israel a form of anti-semitism?*

It isn't anti-semitic to demand that Israel abide by international law.

It isn't anti-semitic to demand that Israel stop committing war crimes.

It isn't anti-semitic to demand that Israel stop demolishing Palestinian homes.

Etc., etc.

*How can Israel make peace when it has no partner for peace?*

The Palestinians have shown again and again that they are willing to make huge sacrifices for peace. It is Israel that has consistently acted to sabotage peace efforts. [You can add: "I would be happy to provide you with documentation about this...."]

*and/or*

Israel doesn't need a partner to dismantle its apartheid laws, or to stop building illegal settlements, or to start abiding by international law.

*Why don't you condemn Hamas rockets and Palestinian suicide bombers?*

We do. We categorically condemn the use of bombs against civilians, whether they be home-made rockets or bombs dropped from airplanes.

*Why are you doing this (e.g. Gaza boat)?*

We believe that peaceful pressure and direct action by ordinary people around the world is crucial to ending the occupation.

*Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East.*

In a real democracy everyone has equal political and civil rights. In Israel Jews have special rights, while Palestinians are denied many basic rights.

*Israel has the right to exist. Palestinians first have to recognize Israel's right to exist.*

No state has the right to exist on territory that doesn't belong to it. The Israeli state does not have the right to occupy and build settlements on Palestinian land. We believe that the world has to recognize the right of Palestinians to exist free of occupation and apartheid laws.

*Why do you say that Israel has imposed a system of apartheid? Isn't that extremist rhetoric?*

Israel fully fits the definition of apartheid. It has created a legal system which grants preferential legal status and material privileges to Jews while discriminating against non-Jews in many ways. It has segregated the population into geographic areas based on which group they belong to. Many communities and settlements are Jewish-only; no Palestinians are allowed to live there. [You can go on as long as the interviewer is willing to listen.]

## Have the Facts ...

It is important to know the relevant facts when you do a media interview. You don't have to know everything about the history of the last 60 years, of course, but you do need to be up on the key points relevant to the immediate issue you will be dealing with, and be able to cite them. (However, if you are asked a question to which you don't know the answer, say you don't know – don't ever make something up if you aren't absolutely sure it is true.)

Facts are key when dealing with Palestine/Israel issues because the facts are on our side. If one looks at the public statements of the 'other side' one is struck with how rarely they refer to facts. Their problem is that they can't appeal to the facts because the facts are so clear. So they need to move the debate to the level of propagandistic assertions that fit into their preferred frame. The 'debate' typically goes something like this:

*Statement: Israel tortures Palestinian prisoners. Here's the evidence.*

Response: Why don't you criticize torture in Syria?

*Statement: The Israeli occupation is illegal. Here's the evidence.*

Response: Israel doesn't have a partner for peace.

*Statement: Israeli has imposed a form of apartheid on the Palestinians. Here's the evidence.*

Response: Why do you keep criticizing Israel? That's anti-semitic.

The trouble with their way of avoiding the facts and changing the topic is that it doesn't work so well anymore. They are increasingly losing the public, though this is not always apparent because the political elite and the media are much more pro-Israel than public opinion generally.

## ... but framing should be based on values.

The key to framing any issue is to speak from a moral perspective and to appeal to people's values.

Our advantage is that the values we base ourselves on are shared by most people. Most people think that it is wrong to deny people their rights because of their religion or ethnic origin. Most people believe in justice and fairness. Most people would be appalled if they knew how Palestinians are humiliated at checkpoints. They would be outraged if they knew how settlers destroy the trees and crops of the Palestinian farmers.

Our challenge is to always keep these values at the centre of our frames when we talk about the issues.

Our failing, at times, is that we forget to speak in a way that communicates our values directly, and instead get ourselves caught up in rhetoric that fails to communicate and that turns people off.

## The other side

The framing of the other side has largely been based on:

- Israel's right to security.
- The right of Jews to have their own state.
- Guilt about the Holocaust and anti-semitism.

For a long time, these sufficed to dominate the public discourse and to shut out alternative frames and points of view.

As this ideological dominance has slowly unravelled, the other side has increased its efforts to shut down dissent, in Israel and abroad. In North America, we have seen extremely aggressive and well-financed propaganda campaigns whose goal is to counteract the decline in support for Israel. A telling characteristic of these campaigns is that they by and large do **not** focus on attempting to justify Israel's behaviour. One has to assume that the architects of the propaganda efforts realize that it is no longer possible to explain war crimes and human rights abuses in a way that the international public will accept.

Instead, the focus has shifted to attempting to shut down criticism of Israel by targeting the most outspoken critics with crude smear tactics and outright censorship. On a growing number of campuses, for example, this has involved harassment and firing of outspoken professors and students, as well as attempts to ban events such as 'Israeli apartheid week'.

In Canada, we have seen attempts to silence criticism of Israel by labelling all such criticism as 'anti-Semitism' and therefore as hate speech. This tactic has a triple purpose: to suppress public awareness of what Israel is doing; to discredit critics by smearing them as 'anti-Semitic', and to keep Jews onside by frightening them with the spectre of anti-Semitism.

A second tactic is to 're-brand' Israel by stressing Israel's positive side, e.g. medical research, technology, arts. This has had mixed success, at best.

A third tactic has been an anti-BDS offensive using the idea of a "buycott", that is, encouraging supporters of the Israeli state to counter boycotts by, for example, buying up Israeli wines or cosmetics. (See websites such as [www.buycottisrael.ca](http://www.buycottisrael.ca) and [www.buycottmonth.com](http://www.buycottmonth.com))

This is a highly questionable tactic in framing terms. The primary aim of the boycott tactic is to raise awareness of what Israel is doing, not to lessen the miniscule demand for Israeli wines. The "Buycott" tactic in fact serves mainly to *support* the goals of the BDS movement. The word "buycott" immediately brings the word "boycott" to mind, and thereby reminds people that there is a campaign to boycott Israel because of its human rights abuses. This far outweighs the trivial impact of a few more people buying a few more bottles of Israeli wine.

## Selected Resources

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## Presenting the Issues: Israel/Palestine: Books & Articles

*This is a brief selection of some concise summary presentations of the facts and the issues.*

For more extensive lists of resources see [www.connexions.org/CxL-MiddleEastResources.htm](http://www.connexions.org/CxL-MiddleEastResources.htm), [www.connexions.org/CxLibrary/CxHeading8340.htm](http://www.connexions.org/CxLibrary/CxHeading8340.htm) and [www.connexions.org/CxLibrary/CxHeading16515.htm](http://www.connexions.org/CxLibrary/CxHeading16515.htm)

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How low will Israel stoop to win the propaganda war? 2009.

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Winning the battle of the narrative: A Working Paper for the 2010 Herzliya Conference.

<http://www.herzliyaconference.org/Uploads/3051winning.pdf>

## Finding websites, resources and media

### Connexions – [www.connexions.org](http://www.connexions.org)

Resources for people working for social justice, including the online Connexions Library (more than 10,000 documents and books), the Connexions Calendar, the Connexions Directory of Social Justice Groups, and the Connexipedia social justice encyclopedia.

### Groups dealing with Israel/Palestine:

[www.connexions.org/Groups/CxGHd8340.htm](http://www.connexions.org/Groups/CxGHd8340.htm) + [www.connexions.org/Groups/CxGHd16515.htm](http://www.connexions.org/Groups/CxGHd16515.htm)

### Articles and books dealing with Israel/Palestine:

[www.connexions.org/CxL-MiddleEastResources.htm](http://www.connexions.org/CxL-MiddleEastResources.htm) + [www.connexions.org/CxLibrary/CxHeading8340.htm](http://www.connexions.org/CxLibrary/CxHeading8340.htm) + [www.connexions.org/CxLibrary/CxHeading16515.htm](http://www.connexions.org/CxLibrary/CxHeading16515.htm)

### Progressive media list:

[www.sources.com/MNN/CxPeriodicals.htm](http://www.sources.com/MNN/CxPeriodicals.htm)

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Media relations service. An annual membership includes a media profile page and unlimited news releases.

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## Appendix

# Tactics of desperation: Using false accusations of 'anti-Semitism' as a weapon to silence criticism of Israel's behaviour

**By Ulli Diemer**

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For more than 60 years, Israel has engaged in a unceasing campaign to dispossess Palestinians of their land and their rights. Its ability to do this has depended on three factors in particular:

- overwhelming military superiority;
- keeping public opinion, especially in North America and Europe, on its side;
- making ordinary working-class Israeli Jews believe that it is in their interest to support Israel's Zionist elite rather than making common cause with ordinary Palestinians.

Israel's military dominance is unchallenged, thanks to unconditional support and limitless supplies of advanced military technology and equipment provided by the United States and its allies (including Canada). However, military dominance has not been able to achieve Israel's ultimate goal: forcing Palestinians to stop resisting and to acquiesce in their dispossession and oppression. Israel's relentless onslaught has been met by equally determined Palestinian resistance which, despite the odds, steadfastly refuses to accept the injustice of occupation.

This Palestinian resistance has called into being an ever-growing international network of support and solidarity. In dozens of countries and hundreds of communities around the world, organizations and movements have emerged to demand that Israel be made to adhere to international law and to basic principles of justice.

**Israel and its supporters see these international campaigns as a huge threat.** Israel has escaped the sanctions that have been applied to other states which commit human rights abuses and violate international law only because the United States automatically vetoes all attempts to hold Israel accountable. Israel is also crucially dependent on huge annual inflows of foreign aid, to the point where it is conceivable that the state would collapse if the flows of outside cash which prop it up were to be withdrawn.

Anything that undermines public support in the U.S., Canada, and Europe, therefore, threatens the external backing on which the Israeli state depends for its very existence. It is true that the governments which turn a blind eye to Israel's violations of international law mostly ignore popular opinion in their own countries as well, but this could change if support for Israel were to become a serious political liability. In this regard, what is particularly worrisome from Israel's point of view is the fact that support for Israel among Jews in the United States and Canada, especially among younger Jews, has declined dramatically. If Jews stop supporting Israel, then all foreign support is in jeopardy.

Threats to Israel's international legitimacy bring with them an even greater internal danger: the danger that Israeli Jews will themselves start seeing the Zionist formula – in essence, a militarized apartheid state holding down the Palestinian population by force – as a dead end.

If working-class Israeli Jews were to see their interests as being different from those of the ruling elite – if they come round to the view that their long-term interests will be better served if they join Palestinians in working for a democratic secular state with equal rights for

Palestinians and Jews – Israel’s ruling class would find itself in the same untenable position that the white elite in apartheid South Africa faced in the early 1990s. Already, Israel’s rulers are debating what to do about the ‘demographic threat’ they are facing: Israeli Jews are leaving the country in increasing numbers to move to other countries, while the Palestinian population continues to increase.

The Palestinian resistance, and the growing international support which it has attracted, have had a substantial effect in changing the way Israel is perceived. Increasingly, international public opinion is no longer willing to turn a blind eye to ethnic cleansing, house demolitions, systematic humiliations, imprisonment, torture, and the indiscriminate killing of civilians, children as well as adults.

Faced with the erosion of its credibility and support, the Israeli state has lashed out by using ever-increasing repression against the non-violent Palestinian resistance. One of the centres of this resistance is the village of Bil’in, which has been fighting the expansion of an illegal Israeli settlement on its land with weekly non-violent protests for more than five years now, protests which have turned Bil’in into an international symbol of non-violent resistance. The Israeli state has been using ever more extreme tactics of harassment and brutality to attempt to crush the village and put an end to the protests, which it correctly believes are causing substantial harm to Israel’s international image. Similar tactics of harassment and imprisonment are being used against other Palestinians who resist, as well as against Jewish Israelis and international solidarity activists who support the Palestinian cause.

At the same time as it attempts to crush internal resistance, the Israeli state, aided by its supporters in the United States and Canada, has launched extremely aggressive and well-financed propaganda campaigns abroad whose goal is to counteract the decline in support for Israel.

A telling characteristic of these campaigns is that they by and large do not focus on attempting to justify Israel’s behaviour. One has to assume that the architects of the propaganda efforts realize that it is no longer possible to explain war crimes and human rights abuses in a way that the international public will accept.

Instead, the focus has shifted to attempting to shut down criticism of Israel by targetting the most outspoken critics with crude smear tactics and outright censorship.

On a growing number of campuses, for example, this has involved harassment and firing of outspoken professors (e.g. Norman Finkelstein, Joel Kovel), as well as attempts to ban events such as ‘Israeli apartheid week’.

In Canada, we are now seeing an attempt to silence criticism of Israel by labelling all such criticism as anti-Semitism and therefore as hate speech. This tactic has a triple purpose: to suppress public awareness of what Israel is doing; to discredit critics by smearing them as ‘anti-Semitic’, and to keep Jews onside by frightening them with the spectre of anti-Semitism.

In Canada, the Harper government, fanatically pro-Israel, is fully involved in this effort. It has cut funding to groups which have supported Palestinians in their quest for justice, and it has set up a Parliamentary body charged with coming up with the legal rationale for making it illegal to criticize Israel.

If the Harper government is successful in getting its way, statements such as the following, all of them expressions of generally accepted principles of human rights and international law, will henceforth be classified as anti-Semitic hate speech in Canada:

**“A state must be the state of all its citizens.”**

Saying this will be classified as ‘anti-Semitic’ because it implies that the Israeli state has a duty to serve and represent all of its citizens equally, Palestinians as well as Jews.

**“Everyone born in a state, and everyone who has been a permanent resident for a specified and reasonable period of time, is entitled to citizenship.”**

Saying this will be classified as ‘anti-Semitic’ because it would mean that Palestinians under the rule of the Israeli state have the right to be citizens of Israel.

**“All citizens of a state must be equal under the law, equally entitled to the rights, privileges and responsibilities of citizenship. A state may not favour, or discriminate against, citizens, on the grounds of religion, ethnicity, or race.”**

Saying this will be classified as ‘anti-Semitic’ because it implies that Israel has to dismantle its discriminatory, apartheid-style system of laws.

**“Every state must accept its internationally recognized borders and must renounce all claims on territory outside of its borders.”**

Saying this will be classified as ‘anti-Semitic’ because it would mean that Israel would have to stop seizing land beyond its borders.

**“All states must abide by international law, including the Geneva conventions, laws against collective punishment, laws against torture, etc.”**

Saying this will be classified as ‘anti-Semitic’ because it implies that Israel has to stop engaging in ethnic cleansing, collective punishment, and other violations of international law.

**“Refugees have a right to return to the lands from which they were expelled by an invading army or occupying power.”**

Saying this will be classified as ‘anti-Semitic’ because it means that the Palestinian refugees expelled from their homeland by Israel must be allowed to exercise their right of return as guaranteed by international law.

**“Sanctions should be applied to those who violate international law.”**

Saying this will be classified as ‘anti-Semitic’ because it implies that Israel should face sanctions for engaging in collective punishment and ethnic cleansing, for practicing torture, for committing war crimes, for defying UN resolutions and World Court rulings, and for other illegal acts.

The attempt to outlaw criticism as Israel by labelling it as ‘anti-Semitism’ is a serious threat which needs to be exposed and challenged. At the same time, it should also be recognized as a tactic of desperation, a tactic that has become necessary because of the ever-growing opposition to the crimes of the Israeli state.

The resort to increasingly blatant open repression is a symptom of loss of control. In the past such tactics would not have been necessary because any criticism of Israel was confined to the outer fringes of public debate. Now it has become mainstream, and those who support an ethnically defined, apartheid-style Israeli state are feeling increasingly threatened. Those of us who support a democratic secular state should feel encouraged, even though the struggle is far from won.

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