

Israel is Not An Apartheid State

The Afrikaan term "apartheid" (setting apart) refers to a system of racial segregation and oppression that was imposed in South Africa by the white minority government that held power from 1948-1994. Anti-Israel actors intent on harming the Jewish state have disingenuously used the apartheid charge as an attack to delegitimize Israel as a country that has institutionalized racism. There is no truth to any of these accusations.

Israel's Commitment to Equality

- Israel is committed to "uphold[ing] absolute social and political equality of rights for all its citizens, without distinction of religion, race, or sex," as stated in its Declaration of Independence and by Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, who declared, "In our state[,] there will be non-Jews as well – and all of them will be equal citizens; equal in everything without any exception; that is: the state will be their state as well."
- Unlike in apartheid South Africa, the State of Israel prohibits discrimination on racial grounds. All Israeli citizens -- Jews, Arabs, Druze, and any other group -- are treated equally under the law. All Israeli citizens are accorded the right to vote in Israeli elections, teach at Israeli universities, and serve in Israeli governmental positions.
- Arab citizens of Israel enjoy the same rights as Jewish Israelis, including the right to form political parties and stand for election as well as opportunities to serve as members of the Knesset, the judiciary, the diplomatic corps, the police, and so on. These rights and privileges are anathema to an apartheid state and eviscerate claims of racial discrimination, which underlie apartheid.

What About Non-Citizens?

- Like all other states, Israel accords different rights for citizens and non-citizens.
- Israel, like all other nation-states, exercises its right to adopt policies and determine who receives citizenship in preservation of its national identity and to refuse citizenship to those who reject its legitimacy.
- Most Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip do not seek citizenship in the Jewish state because they reject the legitimacy of the Israeli government.
- The Israeli government, by the same token, can exercise its right to refuse citizenship to those who reject the legitimacy of the Jewish state.

Some False Apartheid Claims

- **False Claim:** Israel employs Jewish-only or Israeli settler-only roads from which Palestinians are prohibited.
 - **Fact:** There are no "settler-only" or "Jewish-only" roads. There are limited stretches of specific roads in the West Bank that are restricted to cars with Israeli license plates -- regardless of whether the driver is a Jew, an Arab, a settler, or a foreigner. Palestinian cars, issued different colored license plates, can use alternate roads as alternatives to the stretches of roads from which they are restricted. These are security rather than racist measures - because of deadly attacks on Israeli cars by Palestinian perpetrators.
 - **Fact:** By the same token, Israeli drivers are prohibited from entire roads in the areas under full Palestinian control due to the same security concerns.
- **False Claim:** Israel's Law of Return is racist because it favors Jews over others in granting expedited immigrant status in the state of Israel.
 - **Fact:** According to the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), this law is not deemed racist.
 - Article 1(3) permits nations to favor certain groups for citizenship provided such nations do not discriminate against any particular group.
 - According to Article 1(4), a state may exercise a preference in granting citizenship to undo the effects of prior discrimination, which in Israel's case would include such earlier episodes of discrimination as the British decision in 1939 to bar Jewish immigration to Mandatory Palestine, which effectively consigned millions of Jews to deaths in the crematoria of Europe.
 - **Fact:** The Law of Return is similar to laws that have been in effect in many other democracies, especially those with large diasporas, such as Mexico, Ireland, Finland, Greece, Poland, Germany, Italy, and Denmark.

For more information about the differences between Israel and Apartheid, see CAMERA's "Is Israel an Apartheid State?"

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