

Rising antisemitism, Zionism and the Green Party

A statement from Church of England Inter Faith Advisors

As a group of the Church of England's Diocesan Inter Faith Advisers, charged with nurturing relationships of trust between faith communities and ensuring that public discourse does not endanger those relationships, we feel compelled to express our concern at the recent Green Party vote and the antizionist rhetoric surrounding it, without defining what is meant by the term 'Zionism'. For many Jewish communities in England, this vote has deepened an already acute sense of vulnerability. It risks further eroding the trust that has been carefully built between Jewish communities the Church of England and wider society over many years.

This vote does not stand alone. It forms part of a wider and troubling pattern in public life, a pattern we have been monitoring closely in our advisory capacities that has included:

- **the dismissal or minimisation of the realities of the Hamas led pogrom of 7 October 2023**, including the rape and murder of Israeli civilians and the profound trauma this caused to Jewish communities in England and worldwide;
- **the casual and repeated claim of "genocide"**, a term that is experienced by many Jewish people as a libel against their collective identity and history;
- **the recent debate at our own church's General Synod**, which included a decision to "hear" the Kairos II document which contained language that Jewish leaders described as false, harmful, and erasing of Jewish identity. This not only caused real and acknowledged pain, but also ignored the years of work, dialogue, and theological exploration that led to the Faith and Order Commission's *God's Unfailing Word* (2019).
- **Pro-Palestinian demonstrations in London** which are held close to prominent synagogues on Shabbat and where slogans, symbols, and messaging often including people expressing support for Hamas and denial of the legitimacy of Israel as a sovereign state. The Jewish communities' concerns about these demonstrations are largely ignored, leaving Jewish Londoners feeling unseen, unheard, and unsafe in the very heart of the city and prevented from attending some of their places of worship;
- **and the succession of attacks and alleged plots directed at Jewish communities in Manchester and London**: the fatal vehicle and knife attack outside Heaton Park Hebrew Congregation in Manchester; an alleged further Manchester plot involving reconnaissance of Jewish sites and preparations for an explosive device; the arson attack that destroyed four Hatzola ambulances in Golders Green; attempted arson at Finchley Reform Synagogue; and the stabbing of two visibly Jewish men in Golders Green.

We agree therefore, with the Movement for Progressive Judaism's condemnation of the Green Party's motion as antisemitic in its formulation and intention, and with similar statements by the Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis and the Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg the Senior Rabbi of Masorti Judaism UK and with the joint statement of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Jewish Leadership Council that it constitutes an attack on the Jewish community and risks further stoking anti-Jewish hatred. It dismisses as inherently racist the idea of Zionism, that for most Jewish people, expresses the centuries-old longing for safety, home, belonging and self-determination woven through Jewish history, prayer, ritual and communal life and therefore immediately ostracises religious Jews in the Green Party who worship at synagogues all of whose liturgies affirm this longing for Zion and pray for the well-being of Israel. It also fails to acknowledge the great diversity of ways Zionism is understood within the Jewish community.

Taken together, these developments reveal a slippery slope, contributing to a climate which undermines Jewish strength and participation in wider society and increases Jewish vulnerability and marginalisation, Jewish trauma is sidelined, and a strong and visible Jewish identity is treated as politically suspect rather than a societal, theological and communal reality that adds to the diversity of our nation.

As Inter Faith Advisers, we have seen how legitimate advocacy for Palestinian dignity, legitimacy and self-determination - which we affirm - can be distorted when it is not held alongside an equally robust commitment to Jewish safety, Jewish self-identity, and Jewish flourishing in all its diversity.

We therefore state the following:

- **We stand with Jewish communities in England**, and support the statements issued by the Movement for Progressive Judaism and the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Jewish Representative Council
- **We reject language that erases Jewish peoplehood**, denies Jewish trauma, or repeats patterns historically associated with antisemitism and anti-Judaism.
- **We call on Christians in the Green Party to stand in solidarity with Jewish Greens** and work to change their party's policy or reconsider their membership of a party that is now institutionally antisemitic.
- **We call on the Church of England** to continue to develop resources to facilitate the study and understanding of Jewish – Christian relations as outlined in the Faith and Order Commission's *God's Unfailing Word* particularly in its explorations of Zionism and Jewish relationship to the land of Israel.
- **We affirm that condemning antisemitism and raising these issues cannot mean any lack of deep concern for the extreme sufferings of Palestinian people and of all those caught up in violence**, and so we call on all political parties, churches and faith leaders to exercise moral responsibility, avoiding simplistic narratives that erase the lived experience of Jewish people and seek to appropriate blame. Instead

supporting an approach to Israel–Palestine that encourages real dialogue and holds Israeli security and Palestinian freedom, dignity and self-determination together; and giving practical support to reconciliation initiatives such as those promoted by the Alliance for Middle East Peace that emphasise sustained Israeli Palestinian civil-society dialogue, grassroots peacebuilding and an International Fund for Israeli–Palestinian Peace.

The Green Party vote is part of a wider deeply concerning drift towards an increasingly antisemitic culture in our country. As Diocesan Inter Faith Advisers, we believe the Church of England and other churches and religious communities must become a bulwark against that drift, repenting where we have played our part and ensuring any debates on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict are conducted with theological integrity, historical awareness, and pastoral responsibility.

We call upon political leaders, Church institutions, and citizens across England to join us in resisting the current drift in our national life towards increasing antisemitism

The Statement has been endorsed by

The Rt Revd David Walker BISHOP OF MANCHESTER
The Rt Rev Dr Michael Volland BISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM
The Rt Revd Esther Tamisa Prior BISHOP OF ASTON

and the following Diocesan Inter Faith Advisors

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