

Address Delivered by Robert Lantos
On the Occasion of Conferring of an Honorary Doctorate
From the University of Haifa

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Thank you to Hetty Shapiro for organizing this night so brilliantly and thank you to President Shapira for this great distinction. Thank you very much Heather for the warm tribute and for your loyal friendship. Thank you Rob for hosting this night and for your inexhaustible charm and wit. And thank you Tony Comper for your patronage and everyone in attendance for your support. Finally, thank you to the University of Haifa for this truly great honor.

At occasions such as this one the protocol calls for a joke or two. But friends, what I have to say tonight does not lend itself to levity. We live in dangerous times.

As Jews, we face two concurrent wars. The war of rockets and guns, fought almost continuously on Israel's borders - and the war of words, spearheaded by the BDS movement, in tandem with its bred-in Canada campus sibling, the annual festival of hate known as Israel Apartheid week.

Israel has never been defeated on the battlefield, and she must never be. But our enemies have devised other weapons, more sophisticated than

rockets, with which to weaken her through isolation and vilification via the spreading of a false narrative. A false narrative that has become gospel in fashionable, politically correct circles. It is of this war that I would like to speak tonight.

A few weeks ago, I visited the Haifa University campus. I met with students and faculty from the Ambassadors Online program, who are engaged in designing creative and ingenious ways to combat the falsehoods of BDS propaganda. I am delighted that tonight's proceeds are earmarked to support their work. Spending a few hours on this campus in one fell swoop lays waste the lie of Israel Apartheid. Arab and Druze students make up some forty percent of the student body. In classrooms, in the cafeteria, on the grass, they mingle shoulder to shoulder with their Jewish counterparts. They all receive the same education. There is no difference between how Jews and Arabs are treated and no noticeable tension between them. This campus reflects the everyday reality of Israeli society, which is about as Apartheid as downtown Toronto. Simply positioning a dozen cameras around the campus and playing the uncut footage live during the U of T's annual

Israel Apartheid hate carnival would expose it for the vicious libel that it is.

As some of you know, I was born in Hungary. Before the Holocaust, Hungarian Jews took pride in being the most assimilated in all of Europe. They were convinced that their social status, their distinctions and achievements and Hungarianized names like my own, invented by my grandfather, made them untouchable. Yet, the majority of Hungary's Jewish population was murdered in a few months.

But it didn't start with violence. It began with words - and the words set the stage, which then legitimized the violence that followed.

Some 18 years ago, I produced a movie called Sunshine. Sunshine is a family saga, which over the course of three hours, tells the story of the rise and fall and eventual genocide of Hungary's Jewish population. I feel it would be apropos to show you a couple of scenes from that film.

ROLL FILM

RESUME:

We must learn from the lessons of history. Words are powerful weapons. They can legitimize the criminal, they can vilify the just, they can spread lies and they can incite hatred and violence.

The war of words has been fought against Jews for many centuries, in many lands. After the holocaust, we thought that this was over - once and for all. But the cycle has begun again. It is now firing on all cylinders across Europe. In France, in Belgium, in Holland, it has already led to acts of brutal violence.

This week in the UK, Labour Party whip and Member of Parliament, Naz Shah, declared that all the Jews of Israel should be shipped off to the US. She has been suspended - but not ejected from her party. Not long ago, such a comment by a British Parliamentarian would have been unthinkable. Today, it just gets you a light spanking and lots of sympathy.

Because next day, Ken Livingstone, the former Mayor of London, a ranking member of the Labour Party himself, upped the ante. He proclaimed that Adolf Hitler was a Zionist in cahoots with those

working toward establishing the Jewish state. That the monstrous perversion equating Nazism and Zionism can be uttered by the former mayor – not of Tehran, nor of Damascus - but of the cosmopolitan city of London, signals that the war of words has reached a feverish pitch.

For the past half century, cushioned here in Canada, we have come to believe that Jew hatred is a thing of the past. But we can no longer afford to hide our collective heads in the sands of wishful thinking. Led by the BDS movement on our campuses - where tomorrow's leaders are in training today - Jew hatred is gaining momentum. Ill disguised by the paper-thin mask of anti - Zionism, the stated goal of BDS is the elimination of Israel as a Jewish state.

Allow me to quote one Omar Barghouti, a founding member of the BDS movement. In his 2007, One- State declaration, Mr. Barghouti writes: "The two-state solution for the Palestinian – Israeli conflict is really dead. Good riddance! We are witnessing the rapid demise of Zionism and nothing can be done to save it. I, for one, support euthanasia...The two-state solution has passed its expiry date." So, no two-state solution for the leadership of the BDS gang. Their goals fully coincide with those

of Hamas and the Ayatollah of Iran, which makes you wonder who is really behind this movement that positions itself as humanitarian, progressive and campus originated.

As usual, the best way to get to the truth is to follow the money. Which is precisely what Jonathan Schanzer of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies has done. Just last week he testified at a joint hearing before the House Foreign Affairs Committee's sub committee on terrorism. I quote:

“ A new organization called American Muslims for Palestine is the leading driver of BDS, through its sponsorship of Students for Justice in Palestine, which is the most visible arm of the BDS campaign on campuses in the United States. At least seven individuals who work for American Muslims for Palestine have previously worked for organizations shut down in the US for providing financial support to Hamas. Among them, the Holy Land Foundation, which before being dissolved, transferred \$12.4 million to Hamas. One of the officers of this Holy Land Foundation is an individual called Mohammed El-Mezain, identified as the Hamas leader for the United States.” Unquote.

Why does this matter? It matters immensely because the BDS movement has hijacked the progressive narrative and - along with it - the hearts and minds of the socially conscious, among them much of Jewish youth. BDS postures as a champion of justice and equal rights. Propelled by this falsehood, it is gaining momentum daily on campuses. Those who fund BDS and organize it understand that their cause is best served if they themselves lurk in the shadows and recruit the proverbial useful idiots to fly the flag. Celebrities like Roger Waters, who once told me some of his best friends are Jewish, filmmakers like York University's John Greyson, militant activists like Naomi Klein (who sports the all important added value of being Jewish), provide perfect cover for what is nothing other than the propaganda arm of a terrorist organization intent on the destruction of the Jewish state.

Is it not extraordinary that so called progressives ally themselves with authoritarian regimes, who on their home turf are intolerant of women's rights, of freedom of the press, of gays and of members of any religion other than Islam? An oppressive, anti-feminist and intolerant

ideology has somehow managed to appropriate the progressive narrative.

The BDS frontline activists are unfazed by the persecution of Christians in Islamic countries, by Bashar al-Assad's killing of hundreds of thousands of his own people, unmoved by the jailing of dissenters in Iran or by the oppression of women in Saudi Arabia, not interested in the persecution of gays in Qatar or in the antics of Kim Jong-un of North Korea, untouched by the kidnapping and enslavement of women in Nigeria or by female genital mutilation in Somalia.

None of these or any of the other barbaric atrocities perpetrated each day around the world seem to bother the BDS crowd. Their single-minded fixation is on a country whose laws treat all of its citizens equally, regardless of gender, sexual persuasion or race. A country which provides all its citizens with education, healthcare, welfare and full civil liberties. A country where artistic freedom and freedom of the press are sacred. The great Houdini himself would be flabbergasted by this astonishing sleight of hand, a testament to the utterly shameless brilliance of the Palestinian propaganda machine.

The British MP Naz Shah has served a useful purpose. Through her toxic rants, in which she urges her Facebook minions to get organized because, quote “the Jews are rallying,” unquote, she lays to rest the pretense that there is any difference between Jew hatred and anti-Zionism. Her proposal to ethnically cleanse Israel of its entire Jewish population, enthusiastically seconded by celebrity politician Ken Livingstone, helps to crystallize the true intent of the BDS brigade, an intent which has nothing to do with peace or a two-state solution.

The cat is clearly out of the bag – which is a very good thing. It’s a good thing because the time has come for Jews throughout the diaspora to stop kidding ourselves. Hitler and the Nazis were vanquished, but Jew hatred was not. It has found renewed vigor in an unholy alliance between the new Jihadists and their fellow travellers and old school, anti Semites. In the past year Jewish blood has already been shed in a Paris supermarket and on the streets of Istanbul. In much of Europe, Jewish schools and institutions must now be guarded by armed soldiers. Throughout North American campuses, including right here at York, Jewish students are harassed and intimidated, particularly if they dare

state pro-Israeli views. All the while, the administration turns a blind eye. Good Jews are the ones who, much like the family in my movie Sunshine, detach themselves and wash their hands of their own brethren.

The challenge facing us is to find a way to recapture the progressive narrative. Historically and by inclination, since the time of Karl Marx, secular Jews tend to lean to the left. To defeat BDS, we must reclaim the liberal, socially engaged hearts and minds – and in particular, Jewish youth. From Bernie Sanders to J Street and Jews for Peace, liberal Jews have come to believe that they must distance themselves from Israel in order to burnish their progressive credentials. In so doing, they march with those who would eliminate the Jewish state.

Israel has many warts and flaws, all of which should be and are criticized. Some of her political leaders are definitely not my own cup of tea. But it is a travesty to link arms with those who are supported by regimes which deny women's rights, torture and incarcerate dissenters, censor freedom of expression and are intent on the genocide of the Jewish State. This travesty must be exposed with words and actions. To

vanquish BDS, we must shine a light on what its true objectives are, who its allies are and who its financiers are. It is my hope that initiatives like the program at Haifa University which we are here to support tonight will help accomplish just that. Thank you and good evening. Go Raptors go!