

Note: This [letter](#) is also circulating. Sign one or both! We used that letter as a base, but thought it worthwhile to add a few points. We're all in touch, on the same team and going to send the letters together to JDS. Thank you for your support!

December 16, 2023

Dear CESJDS Students, Alumni, Parents, Administration, Faculty and Board of Directors,

On October 7th our world changed. We watched with horror as Hamas initiated war, invading Israel and carrying out the most barbaric attack against Jews since the Holocaust. We saw overwhelming enjoyment of murdering, burning people alive. We heard stories of torturous rape and disfiguration. We helplessly watched while over 200 innocent people were kidnapped and saw body parts paraded through the streets of Gaza to cheering crowds. Over 70 days later, while brave Israeli soldiers have been putting their lives at risk on a daily basis, some of whom have been killed, which includes siblings of CESJDS alumni, we find ourselves facing hate speech and disrespect from our community. Rather than have a meaningful conversation about Israeli policy, the "Community Open Letter" reflects sanctimony rather than empathy towards a people in profound mourning and utterly lacks nuance and critical thought. The letter also fails to respect the agency of the Palestinian people, who govern their society in Gaza; it is patronizing.

Hamas knew that Israel could not sit by while its people were slaughtered. Israel could not risk continued slaughter - an existential threat. Their goal is to eradicate Jews because of who we are – the very concept of genocide, defined by the UN as a "proven intent on the part of perpetrators to physically destroy a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." We need not prove this; Hamas publicly embraces this intent. Israel has a stark choice: to accept victimization and invite eradication or to fight back as an "oppressor" and eradicate Hamas. It is tragic that Hamas leaders hide in tunnels, deliberately risking civilian Palestinian lives with impunity, particularly children, as they cowardly retreat behind them. This is a tactic to elicit enormous criticism from the world. If there was another viable choice, Israel would no doubt take it. There is not.

It's vital the CESJDS community understands the "community" letter was written by a minority of alumni and is attempting to control a narrative and speak for the majority of us. This small group of peers speak from a lofty position of privilege, in which they have the luxury to live well, be safe, which not all of us feel these days. Meanwhile, Israeli mothers and fathers must face the hard reality of a neighbor intent on killing them; accordingly, they must send their children into a war for our people's survival.

This “open” letter *directly* adopts terminology created to define the incomprehensible and horrific scapegoating and murder of millions of Jews by the Nazis. Today this language is absurdly turned on its head by the world’s most abhorrent terrorist groups and human rights abusers. This is very deliberate. It is the classic approach to argument and publicity that is adopted when its advocates have no real foundation for the assertions they make. The “open” letter parrots their mindset and empty arguments.

Judaism advocates education, not proselytization. The purpose of receiving an education is to question, think critically, debate and understand nuance. The letter agrees with that conceptually yet goes on to directly abuse language - a core tool of critical thinking and argument - and uses language definitionally in a different way when it comes to Israel than how the same language is used elsewhere as well as historically. The following are singular illustrations of how this language makes no sense given the current circumstances:

- Genocide: In the 1930s, there were ~300k Jews in Belgium. In 1967, there were 300k Palestinians in Gaza. Today, there are ~40k Jews in Belgium and ~2.3M Palestinians in Gaza. If Belgium had not had an **actual genocide**, at the Palestinian growth rate there would be about ~6M Jews in Belgium. Obviously, if Israel’s intent was genocide, it has the means, without a single Israeli soldier dying, to have ended this war on October 8th. This is not genocide.
- Colonialism: Colonists have a home nation. They seek to extract resources for economic purposes from a foreign land in which they are not the indigenous people. Jews did not have any other home when the State of Israel was created. They were ethnically cleansed from the rest of the Arab world over decades, Jews are indigenous to Israel, and have not extracted economic resources. This is not colonialism.
- Apartheid: Apartheid refers to racial wars with segregated entities and governing bodies. We are ignoring the fact that 2M of the 10M people in Israel are Arabs who vote, attend the same universities, and work at the same companies as Jews. In fact, many Arab towns on the border of Palestinian territory during conversations about two-state solutions pushed to stay in Israel’s territory because of the life and opportunities Israel provides to them. This is not apartheid.

It comes as a shock to many of us that our fellow alumni would spread vicious blood libels about Israel like calling it an apartheid or colonial state or characterizing the war in Gaza as fueled by “genocidal intent.” Any good human being would abhor colonialism, apartheid, and genocide. Using that language to indict Israel and in a form that is definitionally wrong is extremely dangerous. It is incumbent upon us to remember that these blood libels, which for centuries have been used to fuel persecution, continue to

fuel anti-Semitic attacks around the world. We are horrified to see the promotion of insidious anti-Semitic conspiracy theories coming from those in our own community.

As human beings, we mourn the loss of any innocent civilian killed in armed conflict. We take pride in the IDF practicing judicious care, increasing the risk to our own soldiers, to minimize civilian casualties. As of today, the estimates, notably from the notoriously unreliable Hamas-run health ministry, are that 17k Palestinians have died, about 7-8k of whom are Hamas. The majority of the 50k Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters are underground and hard to reach, while the 2.3M civilians are their human shields above ground. If Israel were using “deliberate oppression” or “indiscriminate tactics,” the ratio of terrorists to civilians would be 1:50 or greater given the tunnel systems in which Hamas operates; instead it is 1:2.5. Again, this is due to brave soldiers going by foot into Gaza, dying to fight with Jewish values, preserve innocent Palestinians lives and comply with international law. Sacrificing one’s own life as a soldier reflects the utmost commitment to Jewish values. A letter that ignores facts, which are increasingly ignored in today’s media and universities and which a school like CESJDS must teach, does not reflect Jewish values.

It’s also incorrect to state that Judaism and Zionism are somehow separate. The reason Israel exists and everything that it stands for as a nation cannot be disconnected from our religion, ethnicity and history. Criticism of the State of Israel is the Jewish way, and having debates about the best policies moving forward is how we will progress as a society; but this letter departs from productive discussion. It is difficult to comprehend how Jews can become so detached from reality that they resort to using Holocaust terminology like ‘Never Again’ against their own people. ‘Never Again’ means that we as a people will never stand idly by while we are slaughtered like they were on October 7th. It means that we will never hesitate to defend ourselves against our enemies who are the true practitioners of genocide and oppression.

It is essential as a community that we stand firmly together, which does not mean we agree about every policy. It means that in times of distress - as in a marriage - we do not abandon our people. If there has ever been a time that we should appreciate the Jewish education we had at CESJDS, it is now. In today’s world, young people are quick to stand up against the “oppressed” without any knowledge or nuance. While nice in theory, that is a dangerous and simplistic narrative. Education exists to think intensively and critically. The mainstream hashtags on Tiktok and the “Community Open Letter,” which reflect the same sentiments, do not do this. The challenge CESJDS has in the years ahead, including its alumni, is to maintain its steadfast moral clarity on these matters.

May God protect our Soldiers. May God protect our hostages. May all return home.

עם ישראל חי - Am Israel Chai

Please show your solidarity by signing [here](#)! Go Lions!

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Michael Kader, Class of 2010
Ben Shemony, Class of 2014
Thomas Gutterman, Class of 2010
Arielle Weiss, Class of 2010
Saul Krosnick, Class of 2007
Olivia Susskind, Class of 2010
Talia Evans, Class of 2010
Jon Galitzer, Class of 2013
Amy Zitelman Hersche, Class of 2007
Ben Block, Class of 2010
Natan Haramati, Class of 2009
Ethan Walfish, Class of 2013
Jake Akman, Class of 2010
Ilan Goldstein, Class of 2014
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Staci Smith, Class of 2011
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Ryan Bartlow, Spouse of Davitta Niakani, '07
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Elliot Blask, Class of 2007
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Perah Zohar, Class of 2023
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Juliet Azhdam, Class of 2010
Ari Kestler, Class of 2001
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Maiyan Lyani, Class of 2023
Hedi Sandberg, Class of 2008
Zion Avissar, Parent of '95
Cookie Avissar, Parent of '95
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Alex Arking, Class of 2021
Zack Arking, Class of 2022
Ella Arking, Class of 2026
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Lee Bermanis, Class of 2001
Eli Lerner, Class of 2016
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Dore Feith, Class of 2014
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Hannah Elster, Class of 2018
Avner May, Class of 2005
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Mia Pearce, Class of 2020
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Hadas Heyman, Parent and teacher Avigyle 2020 & Elad 2025
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