



The American Jewish Committee

Advancing democracy, pluralism and mutual understanding

Statement on the Sanctity of Human Life and the Root Cause of the Conflict in the Middle East

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"You shall not stand idly by when your brother's blood is spilt" (Leviticus 19 v.16)

"When you draw near to a city, to fight against it, you shall call unto it for Peace" (Deuteronomy 20 v.10)

Judaism's emphasis on the sanctity of human life, that all are created in the Divine Image (Genesis 5 v.1), is challenged when threatened by mortal attack. Judaism understands the Biblical injunction from Leviticus mentioned above as requiring one to defend one's family and community when attacked, even by violent or aggressive means when unavoidable.

In this spirit Israel responded to the hostilities initiated by Hizbullah a week and a half ago. This latest conflict continues to rage at a heavy price in human life and infrastructure and must evoke the concern of all people of good faith.

For six years Israel has withstood provocation by Hizbullah without retaliation. However, to stand idly by and not respond to the latest attacks would have been to fail the aforementioned Biblical injunction, placing all of Israeli society in mortal peril.

All who hold our Torah dear must grieve at the loss of every single life - not only those Israelis killed and wounded by Hizbullah attacks, but also the hundreds of lives lost in Lebanon, and the suffering and the trauma of all involved.

Most ruthlessly and tragically in terms of the cost of human life, Hizbullah has deliberately located its launching pads, arsenals and logistic centers in civilian areas. To save the lives of innocents, Israel warns people living in urban areas in advance of its reprisals - at great cost to its tactical and strategic interest - to vacate locations that will be under attack, .

Accordingly, all people of good will and good faith must urge that together we achieve a speedy end to this war in a manner that will not simply serve as a "band aid", but secure a real, just and lasting end to hostilities – an end to destruction and death.

The root cause of the conflict and suffering in the region is the continuing refusal of certain Arab nations and Muslim terrorist organizations to accept the Jewish State's presence in her ancestral homeland. It is THIS mind-set and aspiration that drives the attacks of Hizbullah and Hamas and indeed both organizations declare openly that destroying Israel is their goal.

Those who truly care to bring about an end to violence in the Holy Land have the obligation to seek a reconciliation of the spirit that will enable different faith communities and nations to accept the existence of the other, to resolve disputes without bloodshed and to exit from a zero-sum mentality to advance the welfare of all. Thereby the words of the Psalmist may be fulfilled in us all:

"The Lord will give His People strength: The Lord will bless His People with peace" (Psalm 29 v.11)