Today’s Fight Against Antisemitism Is as Consequential as the Six-Day and Yom Kippur Wars

By Ronald S. Lauder

I want to thank the organizers of this forum and I am honored to be among some of the leading thinkers in the Jewish world today.

Our topic: antisemitism.

That’s a discussion we Jews have had for more than 2,000 years. We’ve thought about it, discussed it, fought against it, yet it never goes away.

What makes today’s antisemitism different is that it comes from new sources and part of the blame falls on our shoulders. For the first two decades after the Holocaust – when the world saw the photos of the gas chambers and the piles of bodies – no one in their right mind wanted to be associated with Nazis. In those days, Israel was the start-up nation that the world watched in wonder. It not only survived against all odds. It thrived! And it made Diaspora Jews so proud. We were one people and we cared about each other.

But by the 1980s, Israel’s enemies came up with a new tactic, they could not destroy Israel militarily. They could not destroy Israel economically. So they started a new form of destruction: They would destroy Israel politically. And Israel’s enemies had some willing partners. The United Nations; universities and colleges; many in the international press and electronic media; and now, an even more powerful platform over the last 20 years – the internet. And these willing partners had tremendous influence especially over our children and grandchildren.

Israel was cast as a colonialist-apartheid state, and the Palestinians became the down-trodden, occupied people. In a way, they became David, and now Israel was Goliath. Israel allowed its enemies to define it, and Israel did not respond.

At the same time, we in the Diaspora did not see this rising challenge or we did not take it seriously. That was another mistake. So today, Israel has become the new excuse for the old antisemitism. And our enemies have free rein because there has been no commensurate response from Israel.

Twenty years ago, in a speech I gave in Jerusalem, I said that if Israel put the money for one F-16 fighter into hasbara, it could win this political war. But 20 years later, almost no money was put into hasbara and the situation has grown worse.
Let me be straight with you: This 7th Global Forum on Antisemitism will have the same results as the previous six, a lot of words with no results.

Today’s fight against antisemitism is a war, no less consequential than the Six-Day War or the Yom Kippur War. The survival of Israel and the Jewish people is at stake. We must be united as one people – in a war you can’t be divided. That’s a sure way to lose. We must put aside our petty differences. We must be one people.

As President of the World Jewish Congress, I have traveled to over 40 countries to meet with Jewish communities. All of them told me they felt that Israel had ignored them. But now, they are excited that a new government will change this direction. The Jewish communities throughout the Diaspora are excited and 100 percent behind Prime Minister Naftali Bennett in his leadership and his willingness to work together with the Jewish Diaspora.

They also told me how pleased they are that Minister Lapid is rebuilding the Foreign Ministry. I believe Foreign Minister Yair Lapid will be a great Foreign Minister and I believe he should create a strong public relations and information division that will define the true Israel and not leave that up to our enemies.

The challenges Israel and all Jews face today are enormous. Yes, our enemies are strong; they come from the left now as well as the right. They are well-funded and they have their very influential and willing partners. But Israel has survived challenges before. We must remember this.

This is very important since the world now sees the Palestinians as the downtrodden and occupied people the same way they once correctly saw the Jews oppressed by their neighbors. They even were able to make Hamas look like the Haganah. This is because the real purpose of Hamas has never been correctly defined. One way to combat this is to create two states for two people. A prosperous Israel, alongside a prosperous Palestinian state.

Finally, a stunning news item came out today in the media. A new report shows that a quarter of American Jews believe that Israel is an apartheid state. And 9 percent believe that Israel has no right to exist. That’s 9 percent of American Jews. My guess is that these are mostly young Jews. We could not have a clearer example of the influence of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish haters teaching in colleges over the past decades.

This is the new battlefield. Israel’s new government must fight this now with all the power it has at its disposal, just as it fought its enemies on the plains of Sinai and the hills of the Golan. We in the Diaspora must help as well. Trust me on this. The stakes are just too high at this moment in our history to do this. The Jews in the Diaspora are strongly behind the new government of Israel. We need this new government to be strongly behind the Diaspora.

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