



STRATEGIC REVIEW

PHASE I

IDENTIFYING PRIORITY ISSUES

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WORLD JEWISH CONGRESS

GUIDELINES FOR ACTION

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01 September 2008

THE WORLD JEWISH CONGRESS

The World Jewish Congress represents the interests of its affiliated Jewish communities worldwide.

The World Jewish Congress is politically non-partisan and represents the plurality of the Jewish people.

The World Jewish Congress is actively seeking to to encourage and promote the involvement of younger Jews in Jewish communal and organizational leadership, and to include them in the decision making process and setting of policy of the organization.

1. THE IRANIAN THREAT

1.1 Nuclear programme

CURRENT SITUATION

Iran's nuclear ambitions pose a threat to its neighbours, Israel and the wider world. Some countries do not yet sufficiently realize that Iranian claims that its nuclear programme is only intended for peaceful uses are not credible. Others feel that the threat of massive retaliation, if Iran makes a nuclear attack, is sufficiently prohibitive not to press Iran to the wall on this issue. However, the latter ignore the danger that Iran might build a small-scale nuclear instrument and pass it on to a terrorist organization.

Iran continues to defy key demands of the IAEA and the UN Security Council. Three rounds of sanctions have already been imposed on Iran by the UN, including: travel bans on Iranian officials; the freezing of foreign assets of Iranian companies and officials; and bans on the sale of dual-use items to Iran. A recent UN resolution also urges governments to withdraw financial backing from firms trading with Iran, inspect cargo going into and out of the country, and monitor the activities of two Iranian banks.

The development of Iran's nuclear programme coincides with an intensification of its calls for the destruction of Israel, and thus poses an existential threat to Israel and the Jewish people.

WJC POLICY

- Iran cannot be permitted to possess nuclear weaponry.
- Iran must comply fully with the UN Security Council and the IAEA.
- Iran must immediately and completely stop all nuclear enrichment and reprocessing activities and heavy water-related projects until it is conclusively proven that it is only intended for civilian power generation purposes.
- The sanctions regime needs to be strengthened until it is effective.
- If Iran does not meet the demands of the UN Security Council and the IAEA the sanctions regime should be gradually expanded to also include key Iranian industries such as oil and natural gas (including obstructing Iran's capacity to import refined oil products).
- The international community needs to be united to confront the Iranian threat.
- Other, more drastic, action against Iranian nuclear installations should only be considered as a last resort if all diplomatic avenues have been exhausted and if the sanctions regime fails to deliver any tangible results.

1.2 Sponsor of terrorism

CURRENT SITUATION

Iran is a leading sponsor of terrorism, via radical Islamist groups in other countries. The Iranian regime is providing support to Hamas and Hezbollah, amongst others. Hamas and Hezbollah pose a very real and active threat to Israel and a danger to the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples.

Iran's involvement in the financing of Hezbollah is directly contributing to the internal instability in Lebanon, which in turn has negative implications for the region.

Iran was directly involved in the planning of the terrorist attacks against the Israeli embassy and the AMIA centre in Buenos Aires in 1992 & 1994. It refuses to cooperate with Interpol, which has issued 'Red Alert' arrest warrants against several Iranian citizens.

WJC POLICY

- International organisations and governments must take measures against the proliferation of weapons and funds from Iran to Hamas and Hezbollah.
- Links between Iran and radical terrorist groups need to be exposed and publicised.
- Those involved in the promotion of such terrorist activity should be prosecuted and brought to justice.

1.3 Iran and its international relations

CURRENT SITUATION

Almost all countries – the USA and Israel being the exceptions – have diplomatic relations with Iran. Many European countries also have sizeable business interests in Iran, notably in the oil and gas sectors. Some of the energy companies doing business in Iran are state-owned.

WJC POLICY

- Governments should not encourage or support companies seeking new business contracts in Iran, above all not with state-owned Iranian companies.
- Unless key industries such as oil and gas are affected, UN sanctions are unlikely to be effective.
- Governments should not help companies in their respective countries to clinch deals with Iranian firms.
- Existing contracts with Iran should be suspended until the regime in Tehran accepts all UN demands on its nuclear program.
- Business deals with Iran which contravene the spirit or letter of the UN sanctions regime need to be exposed.

1.4 Iran and Holocaust denial

CURRENT SITUATION

Iran's current leaders, above all president Ahmadinejad, have repeatedly questioned the dimension of the Holocaust, or used the Shoah to criticize Israel. In December 2005, Iran's Foreign Ministry hosted a conference of Holocaust deniers. Iran's regime uses the Holocaust as a political weapon.

Iran propagates the denial of the Holocaust as a means to delegitimize and demonize Israel. Denial of the Holocaust denigrates the memory of those who died and shows the true state of mind of Iran's leadership.

WJC POLICY

- Holocaust denial or trivialisation is repugnant; it needs to be condemned and discredited wherever possible.

2. DE-LEGITIMIZATION OF ISRAEL

2.1 Right to exist & 60th anniversary of the State

CURRENT SITUATION

In 2008, the State of Israel celebrates its 60th anniversary. Although it is still the only fully democratic country in the Middle East, Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state is still questioned.

WJC POLICY

- Israel has a right to exist as a Jewish state in peace, security, stability and prosperity.
- For Jews around the world, the State of Israel is a special place. Israel's well-being is central to Jewish life.
- Jews around the world are proud of Israel's achievements over the last 60 years and support those who continue to build and defend Israel.
- Like every other legitimate state, Israel has a right to defend itself against any acts of aggression that threaten its citizens.

2.2 Israel's international relations

CURRENT SITUATION

Israel is not treated like any other state. It does not have diplomatic relations with a number of states and is often singled out for criticism by international organisations such as the UN.

WJC POLICY

- Governments must apply the same standards to Israel when judging its actions compared with those of other countries.
- Israel should not be singled out for criticism by countries which do not themselves adhere to the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.
- Israel needs to be treated fairly in international organisations, especially in United Nations bodies such as the Human Rights Council.
- All countries should recognize Israel's right to exist, and be open to developing diplomatic ties with Israel.

2.3 Peace process

CURRENT SITUATION

Launching the Annapolis process in November 2007, US president George Bush expressed hope that a settlement between Israelis and Palestinians could be reached by the end of 2008. However, the takeover of the Gaza Strip by Hamas and the continued instability in the Palestinian Authority-controlled territories has complicated peace talks.

WJC POLICY

- A negotiated settlement between Israel and the Palestinians based on a two-state solution is the only legitimate and just way to provide for a lasting peace.
- The nascent Palestinian state should respect the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. A Palestinian state can only be founded if it respects Israel's right to exist in security.
- Initiatives that help to enable the Palestinians to advance economically and socially should also be supported as a means of stabilising the peace process.

3. TERRORISM

CURRENT SITUATION

Since the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington DC, the Madrid and London train bombs, and the attacks in Bali, Islamist terrorism has posed a major threat to the world. Jewish sites have also been a particular target of Islamist terror groups, resulting in the 1992 Israeli Embassy and the 1994 AMIA bombings in Buenos Aires, as well as the attacks against synagogues in Djerba and Istanbul.

The advance of radical Islam in many countries is worrying. It undermines inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations, provides the basis for terrorism and puts in question democratic values.

WJC POLICY

- Violence supposedly justified in the name of God is misguided. The spread of violence and terror must be fought by eradicating its root causes, halting the proliferation of arms to countries sponsoring terrorism, and by actively defending democracy, human rights and the rule of law.
- Legislation prohibiting the incitement to terrorist acts and spreading of hate propaganda, particularly by radical clerics preaching in mosques, needs to be adopted and properly enforced.
- Governments need to provide adequate security measures to protect Jewish centres and Jewish individuals from terrorist threats.

4. ANTI-SEMITISM

4.1 Action against anti-Semitism

CURRENT SITUATION

According to a recent report by the Stephen Roth Institute, there was an increase in anti-Semitic incidents world-wide of 6.6 per cent in 2007 compared with the previous year. Moreover, the number of severe violent attacks rose threefold in 2007.

Anti-Semitism is still a deeply-rooted phenomenon in many liberal democracies, despite efforts by governments and independent organisations to tackle it. Hatred against Jews is nowadays also very entrenched in many Muslim countries.

WJC POLICY

- Anti-Semitism in all its forms must be combated vigorously by determined action of governments and civil society.
- Of particular importance are the education of young people, the role of the media, and the action by police and the judiciary in bringing perpetrators of anti-Semitic crimes to justice.
- Governments and international organisations need to provide adequate resources for the fight against hatred, notably by providing security to Jewish communities and by improving education.
- Laws against anti-Semitism and other forms of racism need to be adopted and enforced properly in every country.

4.2 Neo-Nazi groups

CURRENT SITUATION

In many countries, neo-Nazi groups are gaining ground. Marches and rallies are increasingly being held by extremist organisations. Sometimes, those intentionally pass by Jewish sites or are held to coincide with important Holocaust-era anniversaries.

WJC POLICY

- All forms and expressions of neo-Nazism, xenophobia and intolerance are unacceptable and have to be condemned.
- The full force of the law needs to be applied to those who are a danger to democracy liberty and Jewish communities.
- Marches by extremist, anti-Semitic neo-Nazi groups should be banned where national laws provide for such a possibility.
- Governments and political leaders should condemn such events and work together with local Jewish communities.

4.3 Anti-Zionism = Anti-Semitism

CURRENT SITUATION

Anti-Semitism often comes in the form of excessive, unbalanced criticism of Israel, including calls for boycotts of Israeli products, etc. In 2007, a British trade union called for the boycott of Israeli academics. The Paris and Turin book fairs in March and April 2008 were boycotted by many Muslim countries and intellectuals because Israel was invited as the guest of honour. In most cases, such expressions of anti-Zionism are just another form of anti-Semitism

WJC POLICY

- Israel's thriving democracy is rightly open to criticism. However, unfair and biased attacks against Israel or Jews supporting Israel need to be condemned and countered.
- Boycotts of Israel in any form are unjustified and unacceptable.

- Subtle media that blurs anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism in order to inflame and exacerbate public dislike of both Israel and Jews should be exposed.

4.4 Anti-Semitism in the media and on the internet

CURRENT SITUATION

Along with everybody else, extremists are increasingly making use of the internet, the most wide reaching form of mass media. Extremist groups use the internet to advertise themselves and their ideologies, publicise their activities, communicate with their members and raise funds. Young, impressionable, people are increasingly being misled by hate propaganda disseminated in this way.

Technological advances have also reduced the cost of producing and distributing books and leaflets and television and radio shows can be produced and broadcast over the internet for little or no cost.

WJC POLICY

- Governments, regulators, online retailers and internet service providers need to address the proliferation of anti-Semitic and other hate material on the internet and adopt clear guidelines on this issue, especially when children and teenagers are targeted.
- Anti-Semitic broadcasters or newspapers must not benefit from state-funding. Where possible, licenses for TV and radio broadcasters should be granted only if these do not disseminate hate propaganda.
- Self-regulation by internet service providers and online retailers to prevent the spread of anti-Semitic, xenophobic or racist material is the appropriate way to deal with this issue. Online retailers and companies must take their responsibilities seriously, or risk being exposed. It is morally wrong and distasteful to make money with items glorifying the Nazis.
- Companies that knowingly accept the publication, or promote the sale, of anti-Semitic or racist materials on their platforms and websites should be condemned, and in extreme cases boycotted. However, freedom of speech should not be restricted and efforts to combat hate propaganda in the media should not primarily consist of bans and censorship.

5. RESTITUTION, COMPENSATION AND HOLOCAUST LEGACY

5.1 Restitution and compensation

CURRENT SITUATION

The WJC has led a number of restitution efforts over the past decades and was a founding member of the World Jewish Restitution Organisation (WJRO). However there are still some countries that have not yet adequately addressed the issue of property restitution.

WJC POLICY

- Restitution and compensation is primarily about justice and not only about money. It is about honouring those who perished in the Shoah and helping those who survived unimaginable anguish in the Nazi death camps.
- Negotiations should be conducted in the framework of the WJRO (which includes the Claims Conference and other international Jewish organizations) in coordination with the Israeli government and with the support of the US government and the European Union.
- The distribution of any compensation monies should not be handled by the WJC. The WJC does not seek any form of commission or gratification payments from Holocaust-era compensation or restitution agreements.
- Funds destined for Holocaust survivors, or their heirs, should be transferred to them without delay.
- Poland needs to urgently implement the law allowing for the return of confiscated properties, or alternatively for the payment of adequate compensation, to victims of the Holocaust or their heirs.
- Bosnia, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia should also engage in immediate negotiations to bring closure to this issue in the interests of all.

- The German government and others need to ensure that poor survivors of the Shoah continue to have access to adequate medical and social services, and receive a decent pension.

5.2 Holocaust commemoration and education

CURRENT SITUATION

Some countries do not adequately commemorate WWII- and Holocaust-related events. In many eastern European countries, Holocaust education is insufficient and/or inaccurate.

WJC POLICY

- Initiatives by international organisations, governments, NGOs and private individuals to organise commemorative events on Holocaust related anniversaries are important and should be welcomed.
- Political leaders and well-known personalities ought to participate in such events, as they serve as an important reminder for today's generation.
- Holocaust education should be included in every school curriculum, in all countries. Providing good education and information about the Holocaust becomes even more important as Shoah survivors will soon not be there to tell their story any more.

5.3 Holocaust denial

CURRENT SITUATION

The denial or trivialization of the Holocaust is becoming increasingly fashionable.

WJC POLICY

- Denial of the Holocaust is abhorrent. It denigrates the memory of those who suffered and died at the hands of the Nazis.
- Denial of the Holocaust has become a political weapon by anti-Semites, especially in Europe. EU wide legislation bringing a unified approach to legal action against Holocaust deniers is imperative.

6. JEWS IN ARAB LANDS

CURRENT SITUATION

The story of the Jews of Arab lands forms a major gap in most of the world's knowledge of the history of the Middle East. Jewish presence in what are now Arab lands long predates Islam and the Arab conquest of the Middle East and goes back to Biblical times. In 1945, there were approximately 866,000 Jews living in communities throughout the Arab world. Today, there are fewer than 7,000. In many Arab states, once thriving Jewish communities have been all but wiped out. According to official statistics, 856,000 Jews left their homes in Arab countries between 1948 and the early 1970s.

In April 2008, the US House of Representatives unanimously adopted a resolution calling for the recognition of Jewish, Christian, and other refugees from Arab lands. The resolution says that any agreement between Israelis and Palestinians must include recognition of Jewish refugees as well. The resolution makes it clear that the subject should be brought before the UN General Assembly again, to have it recognize the plight of the Arabic Jews.

WJC POLICY

- The plight of Jews who fled from, or still live in, Arab lands and their specific concerns are not well-known and need to be raised with governments and international organisations.
- Where illegal seizure of assets took place, these should be returned to their former owners, or adequate compensation should be paid.
- Jews remaining in Arab lands, as well as other religious minorities, should be granted religious freedom and allowed to practice their faith according to their traditions.
- Jewish communal sites in Arab countries must be preserved and respected.

7. INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

7.1 Dialogue with Christian churches

CURRENT SITUATION

The WJC has well established relations with the Catholic Church, and has played a leading role, both directly and within the framework of ICJIC, in the dialogue with the Catholic Church over many decades. This dialogue has produced positive results in many cases. The recently adapted Latin text of the Good Friday prayer is a contentious issue.

Progress, however, is slow with regard to the Orthodox and Protestant Churches. The decentralised nature of these churches and certain political issues related to the Middle East conflict are obstacles to advancement.

WJC POLICY

- Dialogue with the Christian churches is an important mechanism for increasing understanding between the faiths and for increasing mutual theological knowledge.
- Dialogue must be based on mutual respect for the values of each faith.
- Dialogue is the best method of resolving issues of contention, and for improving cooperation on issues of common concern like the subjects of nationalism and religious identity, preventing intolerance, anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

7.2 Dialogue with Islam

CURRENT SITUATION

Dialogue with representatives of moderate Islam is one of the most important and challenging issues at this time. The increasing gap of understanding between so-called 'Western liberal democracies' and the Islamic world is extremely dangerous.

WJC POLICY

- Discussion and debate between brethren who share a common root will lead to the realisation that shared ideals, aspirations and values far outweigh any differences that may exist.
- Extremists represent only a small part of Islam. The vast majority of Muslims are peace-loving people who do not support or wish to engage in terrorist activities.
- Whilst combating the threats posed by 'Radical Islam' it is important to embrace the proponents of 'Moderate Islam' and to engage with them in open and constructive dialogue.
- Dialogue should not only be limited to a theological debate, but also to exchanges of views on sociological, cultural, diplomatic and political issues.

7.3 Triologue of the Abrahamic Faiths

CURRENT SITUATION

In July 2008, the Muslim World League held an interfaith meeting to which representatives of many religions were invited. 'The International Conference for Dialogue' was an initiative of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, and was a significant step forward in opening the possibility of a triologue of Abrahamic faiths. The WJC was amongst the Jewish organizations that were represented at the meeting.

WJC POLICY

- All religions, and especially the three Abrahamic faiths, can work together to respond to the challenges posed by developments in modern society, especially to discuss and promote shared values.
- Cooperation between local communities can respond to the challenges posed by a changing world (environmental, globalisation, violence, terrorism, decline of values etc.) and can show that religions have viable answers to these challenges in the contemporary world.

7.4 Dialogue with other faiths

CURRENT SITUATION

There is almost no contact between Jewish leaders and other faiths, on an international level.

WJC POLICY

- Dialogue with all representatives of all faiths is important in building bridges of understanding and establishing respect.