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Why I am pulling out of the Israeli Government antisemitism conference

I was due to participate in the [International Conference on Combating Antisemitism](#), organised by the Israeli Ministry of the Diaspora on 26–7 March, but I have now reluctantly decided to pull out.

There are too many far-right speakers on the agenda who associate themselves with anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian movements: from Marine Le Pen's RN in France; Milorad Dodik, President of Republika Srpska; Eduardo Bolsonaro from Brazil; Hungary's Fidesz party; and others in the European Parliament group 'Patriots for Europe'.

I am a Professor of Sociology at [Goldsmiths, University of London](#); I am the Academic Director of the [London Centre for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism](#); I set up the [Engage](#) network that opposed the campaign to boycott Israeli academics; I wrote a sociological account of [Contemporary left Antisemitism](#); and I have been a leader in the fight against antisemitism on the left and on campus for 20 years.

It is completely appropriate for Israel, as the Jewish state, to host meetings of politicians, activists and scholars against antisemitism and to lead opposition to antisemitism worldwide.

It is clear to me that anti-democratic thinking is fertile ground for antisemitism and that the best way to undermine antisemitism is to support democratic thinking, movements and states. It is completely appropriate that, as a democratic state, Israel continues to uphold the values upon which it was founded, which are set out in its declaration of independence:

THE STATE OF ISRAEL will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

In an increasingly hostile world, the State of Israel is hungry for allies, but it must be disciplined in keeping some distance from those who do not share its values. Israel could listen more attentively to the advice of local Jewish communities and it should not offer the populist right, which has fascistic antisemitism in its heritage and amongst its support, an official Jewish stamp of approval.

There is obvious danger to Jews in fomenting populist contempt for a fictional and all-powerful, dishonest, liberal, metropolitan, finance-capital, educated, cosmopolitan, globalist elite.

My enemy's enemy is not necessarily my friend and Muslims are not the enemy of the Jews, or of democracy. Islamist *antisemitism* and Islamist movements are formidable enemies, as are Christian, right wing and left wing antisemitisms. The enemy is a political enemy, not a religious or a racial one. We must embrace democratic politics that is open to all, and not one that, like antisemitism itself, consigns people arbitrarily and irretrievably to the enemy camp.

I respect the legitimacy of the Israeli Government, but as a scholar my job is to speak clearly when I judge that the wrong path is being considered. I hope that Global Forums in the future will return to the practice of bringing together diverse viewpoints and approaches in serious, evidence-based and rational debate.

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