



Ilan Pappé | From Words into Action | Keynote Speech | JAZIC 2 (Dublin, 2026)

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A Jewish anti-Zionist activist argues that Jewish voices have a moral duty to counter the weaponization of Judaism and antisemitism discourse to shield Israeli policies, and calls for disrupting the equation of Zionism with Judaism while centering Palestinian self-determination and decolonization.

SAŽETAK

Speaking at the second anti-Zionist Jewish Congress in Dublin, the speaker contends that despite 45 years of activism questioning whether a distinctly Jewish voice for Palestine is necessary, recent political developments—including the appointment of a pro-Zionist lobbyist as chief advisor to Britain's incoming Prime Minister—demonstrate a moral imperative for Jews to oppose how Judaism is weaponized to justify Israeli policies. The speaker argues that Western political elites use antisemitism discourse to silence Palestinian solidarity and shield genocidal policies, and that Jewish anti-Zionists must present a counter-narrative disrupting the claim that Zionism represents the hegemonic interpretation of Judaism. The talk traces the historical roots of this conflation to 1945, when post-war Europe, having refused to welcome Jews back into European society, instead supported their colonization of Palestine—a project later bolstered by West Germany's rehabilitation during the Cold War. The speaker calls for Europe to reckon with its complicity in this displacement and emphasizes that Palestine's future lies in decolonization, restoration of Palestinian self-determination, and recognition of the region's pre-Zionist history as a shared Arab-Islamic space where Jews, Muslims, and Christians coexisted. The conclusion reframes the answer to antisemitism as Palestinian liberation.

KLJUČNE PORUKE

Jewish anti-Zionists have a special role in countering the weaponization of antisemitism discourse by Western political elites to justify Israeli policies and silence Palestinian solidarity.

The narrative equating Zionism with Judaism must be disrupted through sustained, strategic education about how Zionism emerged and developed historically, and how it differs from Jewish tradition and belief.

Post-war Europe (1945 onwards) made a strategic error by refusing to reintegrate European Jews into European society and instead supporting their colonization of Palestine, a project later weaponized to legitimize West Germany during the Cold War.

Palestinian voices and leadership must be centered in international solidarity movements; external allies must listen to what Palestinians identify as their needs rather than imposing external agendas.

Palestine before Zionism and imperialism was part of the Arab-Islamic world where Jews, Muslims, and Christians coexisted; the Judeo-Christian framing of Israel serves as a shield of immunity for Western complicity in Palestinian dispossession.

Decolonization of Palestine and recognition of Palestinian self-determination and freedom represent the true answer to centuries of antisemitism.

The speaker calls on Europe to undertake a moment of reckoning regarding its historical role in displacing Palestinians as a consequence of European antisemitism and genocide.

CLANAK

Opening Remarks and the Purpose of Jewish Anti-Zionist Action

I want to thank the organizers and all of you for making it to the second anti-Zionist Jewish Congress after a very successful one in Vienna. I'm sure this will be a great success in Dublin as well. In 45 years of activism, I was always doubtful whether there really needs to be a Jewish voice for Palestine. There needs to be a universal voice for Palestine. Who cares whether you are Jews, Muslims or Christians? If you are human beings with a modicum of decency in you, how can you be indifferent to the suffering of the Palestinians? But every now and then, something happens that reminds you that there is a moral imperative as Jews to work against the way Judaism is used in order to aid the suppression and suffering of the Palestinians.

The last reminder came to me yesterday when someone who is going to be the new Prime Minister of Britain adopted, as his main chief advisor, one of the greatest Zionist lobbyists in the world. This shows the power of the Zionist lobby—or at least the perceived power of the Zionist lobby by someone who will be the Prime Minister of Britain. It is very clear, since we are talking about the Labour Party in Britain, that this would revolve around the discourse of anti-Semitism, around the need to protect the

Jews of Britain. All of this comes within the framework of succumbing to the power of the pro-Israeli and pro-Zionist lobby. Whether this lobby really has the power to destroy political careers is less important than the perceived idea among someone like Andy, who is going to be the Prime Minister of Britain, that he thinks he has to immunize himself with the appointment of a pro-Zionist lobbyist—really the ultimate pro-Zionist lobbyist in British politics.

The Special Role of Jewish Anti-Zionists in Countering State Discourse

This is when I do believe that we have a special role to play. When the political elite in the West still weaponizes anti-Semitism to silence solidarity with the Palestinians or to justify its own complicity with Israeli genocidal policies on the ground, we must speak. Despite everything that has unfolded in Palestine in the last three years, despite the knowledge and visibility of that suffering, this is still the discourse of the political elite in the West and the mainstream media in the West: the main concern is for the Jewish communities and not for the Palestinians who are being colonized, genocided and dispossessed in Palestine. This is abnormal, unjust, immoral, but something that we have to face. I think that is one of the importances of such a gathering, because we are being used as a shield of immunity to allow policies of genocide, ethnic cleansing and dispossession.

We have really two options here. Either we will be able to present a counter-Jewish voice to the one that claims that the hegemonic interpretation of Judaism is Zionism—namely, that the only way of understanding Judaism is as a religion of supremacy that justifies the dehumanization, the dispossession and colonization of other people. If we will not be able to counter this narrative, it would be very difficult to blame people for saying, well, you know, this is what Judaism is all about. The worst part of it is that we, like many others, would delay the kind of vision that I fully believe is right and is going to happen. But we want it to happen sooner rather than later. If it does not happen sooner, then not only the counter-idea of what Judaism is would be a failure, but also the destruction on the ground will continue and intensify.

The Conference Framework: Words into Action

Since this conference is focused on action and the title is "From Words into Action," I think we have two roles here. One is that we are still members—I hope all of us are members of the international solidarity movement with the Palestinians. Not because of who we are specifically, but because of something that needs to be hammered into the discussion of an international solidarity movement: we have to remind ourselves what solidarity is. We need to allow the Palestinians to tell us what they need. We don't tell the Palestinians what they need. They tell us what they need from us. It is still surprising, and this is not about this conference, because this conference has a

very clear identity. But it is still surprising that there is still not enough space for authentic Palestinian voices talking clearly about their ambition, about their vision, about telling us as a solidarity movement what they need from us.

There is something, especially in the West, that still maybe unconsciously carries with it—even in the left—an Islamophobic tendency, a colonialist legacy. We need to get over it. This is the stage for Palestinians, not only to tell us how much they are suffering, but to tell us what we need to help free Palestine and decolonize it.

Disrupting the Zionism-Judaism Narrative

Our ability to challenge the way that Judaism was usurped and weaponized in order to create an international coalition that gave immunity to Israel—and before that, the Zionist movement—to colonize Palestine, to ethnically cleanse the Palestinians in 1948 and since 1948, and now to go on with intensified ethnic cleansing in the West Bank, genocide in Gaza, and now also ethnic cleansing in south Lebanon and parts of Syria. Part of our ability to fight against this weaponization is our specific role, not only as members of the international solidarity movement. I hope that in this Congress and maybe in the third one or in between the Congresses, there is a lot of work to be done to really disrupt the narrative that equates Judaism with Zionism, to disrupt the narrative that equates anti-Zionism with antisemitism.

This cannot be done by sound bites. We have to find a way of getting people to have the patience and the space for us to tell them how Zionism emerged historically, how it developed historically, and what it has become today and how far it is from what so many of us believe Judaism is all about, both historically and in the way we understand Judaism today. Whether we live in Ireland or whether we live even in Palestine itself, it doesn't matter. This is something that can only be conveyed through hard work that has a clear strategy and clear tools to engage with as wide an audience as possible to disrupt that narrative. Because as stupid and irrational as this narrative sounds to us here in this hall, it is still very popular, very attractive, and unfortunately very effective—not only among cynical politicians, but unfortunately also among members of society who are less knowledgeable and fall into the fabrication that underlies this kind of narrative.

Reckoning with 1945: Europe's Post-War Mistakes

I want to say that we need to also be engaged in something else. This goes back to 1945, and I hope that the Congress will adopt a suggestion that I have, because I really think it is important. In 1945, Europe, especially West Europe, was definitely traumatized by the Second World War. For three years, intellectuals, international jurists and historians were thinking: how do we build a world that would not experience once more the First World War, the Second World War, the genocide of the Jews, the genocide of other people? Let's have a declaration of human rights. Let's

build the United Nations with its institutions like the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court later on, and all the conventions that went with it.

What is so interesting historically is the way that so many intellectuals in the West, so many political leaders in the West, engaged in this conversation about how to create a world that would not experience once more the horrors of the Second World War without talking with anyone in the colonized world. This was a total internal conversation between colonialist powers, with not one representative from the colonized world. Most of the world was colonized in 1945. And what is so interesting is their discussion on the Jewish issue itself. Not one of them said, "Let's call upon the Jews of Europe. Come back to Europe. Be part of Europe. Be part of our effort to create a society that would never be open to ideas that led to the genocide of Jews or any other people because of who they are." No. What is so typical of the discussions of politicians, intellectuals and academics was to say the best thing we can offer the Jews of Europe after genociding them is to help them to colonize Palestine. The country that led this movement was West Germany, under the guidance of the United States and Britain, because we were entering the period of the Cold War. You needed to turn a Nazified Germany—which was still not de-Nazified between 1945 and 1948—into a legitimate state. Most of the Nazis were still part of the administration. You needed to legitimize the idea of a new Germany for the purpose of the Cold War. What better way to legitimize a Nazi Germany than with a declaration from the young state of Israel? Yes, there is a new Germany. There was a price. A lot of money went to Israel for that declaration. A lot of money to build the Israeli military force. And still later, when even the United States and France refused to help Israel build nuclear weapons, they could have relied on the West Germans both for expertise, because they had it in the Second World War, and money for building Israel's nuclear capacity—the capacity that now endangers the world far more than any enriched uranium at the bottom of Iranian soil.

A Call for European Reckoning

This is a call that is still not too late to be made. Not because practically Jews would leave from Israel and go to Europe—the idea is first of all symbolic. We as Europe made terrible mistakes—mistakes in plural—when we allowed anti-Semitism to become a genocidal force, and then allowed this terrible thing to become a tool for genociding the Palestinians. It is not too late for us to have a moment of reckoning, of our role, of our complicity in our relationship with the Jewish people, which was imposed on the Palestinians, who had nothing to do with it. That is a very important call.

Palestine and the Arab World Before Zionism

This is connected to the final point I want to make. Before the arrival of Zionism and imperialism to Palestine and the Eastern Mediterranean, this was part of the Arab world. This was part of Islamic civilization. This was a space where Jews, Muslims and Christians knew how to live together before the arrival of Zionism and before the arrival of imperialism. Yes, there was a Jewish presence. There were Arab Jews, but not one of them thought that the future lies in the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. They saw the relationship with the other communities as improving, as becoming better, and like everyone else, were hoping for a better future that was disrupted both by imperialism and Zionism.

The whole idea that Israel belongs to the Christian, to the Judeo-Christian civilization, is another shield of immunity that allowed the West to believe that it is protecting an organic Western European project. All of that has to be disrupted as well. The Arab world needs Palestine. Palestine needs the Arab world. Part of our revisiting the narrative about Jewish history and Jewish life has to include revisiting of Arab Jewish life. It is a great tragedy that the third generation of Arab Jews in Israel today compose one of the most racist sections within Israeli society. But that doesn't mean that we do not have to put a challenge to that as well.

Conclusion: The Answer to Antisemitism

In a Congress that deals with Judaism as an anti-Zionist idea, the best way—the best answer for centuries of anti-Semitism, for hatred of Jews—is today in 2026 to decolonize Palestine and to designate it and allow the Palestinians to live as free people on their homeland. Thank you.

#Jewish anti-Zionism #Palestine decolonization #Israeli-Palestinian conflict #Zionism and Judaism
#Antisemitism weaponization #Palestinian self-determination
#European complicity and historical reckoning