Anti-Semitism and the Situation in the Middle East

Teaching Aid

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Anti-Semitism and the Situation in the Middle East

International developments are sometimes used as a pretext to voice anti-Semitism. Such discourse has been condemned internationally. At the 2014 OSCE Ministerial Council in Basel, participating States declared unambiguously that international developments, including with regard to the Middle East, never justify anti-Semitism.[1] The United Nations Secretary General, António Guterres, stated in August 2017 that, "to express […] the wish to destroy the state of Israel is an unacceptable form of modern anti-Semitism."[2]

Teachers within the OSCE region have expressed anxiety about how issues related to the Israel-Palestine conflict might play into their efforts to address anti-Semitism in the classroom. Some feel inadequately prepared to be able to deal with such issues. Regardless of any position taken, separating issues related to the Israel-Palestine conflict from the question of addressing anti-Semitism in the OSCE region is rarely possible in practice, because both migratory and other international ties between various groups, as well as global media coverage, mean that issues in one part of the world cannot be isolated from those in another.[3]

Educators should be equipped with the knowledge of what anti-Semitism is and informed about some of the debates regarding its complexities. This teaching aid aims to provide the necessary tools to support teachers when they encounter anti-Semitism related to the situation in the Middle East. The information provided is intended to help prevent and address confusion and misunderstanding when addressing this complex topic in the classroom.

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[1] OSCE Ministerial Council Declaration No. 8/14, "Declaration on Enhancing Efforts to Combat Anti-Semitism", Basel, 5 December 2014, <http://www.osce.org/cio/130556?download=true>.

[2] United Nations Secretary-General, Secretary-General's remarks to the media with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, 28 August 2017, https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-encounter/2017-08-28/secretary-general%E2%80%99s-remarks-media-prime-minister-benjamin .

[3] Paul Weller and Ihsan Foster, "Report on Classroom Challenges for Teaching About and Addressing Anti-Semitism in the OSCE Region", University of Derby, 17 May 2019, p. 40-41, <https://derby.openrepository.com/handle/10545/623753>. This research was prepared in response to a request from and financed by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), and carried out between 2016-2018.

Background

In recent years, individuals, groups or property that are perceived to be Jewish or are associated with the Jewish community have sometimes been reinterpreted as symbols of the State of Israel and its policies. This reinterpretation has led them to become the target of attacks and/or discrimination, often of an anti-Semitic nature. Such incidents may be more likely to occur when tensions mount in the region. Jewish people may censor themselves in school, in the workplace, online or in social settings, and thus not avail themselves of their right to freedom of expression, notably if expressing empathy or support for Israel.

There is ongoing discussion about whether negative attitudes towards Jews today reflect a "new anti-Semitism" or whether they are the same prejudices in a new guise. New or contemporary anti-Semitism may include manifestations of anti-Semitism in the context of discussions relating to the situation in the Middle East or forms of anti-Semitism that appeared after the Holocaust, such as Holocaust denial and distortion.

Criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as anti-Semitic.[4] However, it is important for educators to understand that criticism of Israel may in some cases be informed by anti-Semitic assumptions and beliefs that are simply applied to Zionism, Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is evidenced when anti-Semitic slogans, insults and, sometimes, physical intimidation accompany such acts. Holding Jewish individuals or Jews collectively responsible for the situation in the Middle East or excluding individuals based only on their Jewish identity is anti-Semitic. Anti-Semitic propaganda circulated online is a key source for these manifestations of anti-Semitism.

In some circles, Holocaust deniers claim that Jewish deception about the Holocaust buttresses Western support for the State of Israel.[5] This can be accompanied by classic anti-Semitic themes, such as accusations of greed, power, deceptiveness and criminality.

Both online and in the real world, anti-Israel perspectives are sometimes merged with ancient anti-Jewish stereotypes, which can be very harmful. The myth of a global Jewish conspiracy has echoes in contemporary opinions about the supposed over-representation of Jewish people in various social and economic sectors, or Jewish influence on institutions.

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[4] Working Definition of Antisemitism adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in 2016, <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism>

[5] *Addressing Anti-Semitism: Why and How? A Guide for Educators* (Warsaw and Jerusalem: ODIHR and Yad Vashem, 2007), <http://www.osce.org/odihr/29890?download=true>, p. 25.

This may also be seen in accusations that the Jewish people are responsible for virtually every war or catastrophe, such as the Persian Gulf Wars or the rise of violent extremist groups in the Middle East. In recent years, the Internet has given conspiracy theories, including anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, increased reach and a veneer of legitimacy.

In order to respond effectively to anti-Semitic tropes, stereotypes and misconceptions, it is necessary to be able to identify their various forms and understand how these falsehoods developed over time. Below are some of the most persistent myths, tropes and memes about Jews, which are intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive.[6]

Blood Libel

For hundreds of years, Jews have been falsely accused of killing non-Jews for ritual purposes and purported to be in league with the devil. In medieval Europe, beginning in the 12th century, this was often accompanied by accusations that Jews used their victims' blood to bake matzah for the Jewish holiday of Passover. Historically, these false allegations have frequently been followed by anti-Semitic riots and mass murders. Echoes of this blood libel can still be heard in discourse today.

Demonization

Beginning primarily in the fourth century, some influential figures in Christian theology have associated Jews with the devil or with demonic elements. During some periods of the Middle Ages, Jews were seen as children of the Devil, portrayed with horns and bulging eyes, and associated with Satanic attributes, such as immense power and devious logic. In the contemporary world, these images are being resurrected in depictions of Jews, individually or collectively, bearing malevolent characteristics. This can be seen, for example, in caricatures of Jewish public figures depicted as devils or demons.

Dual or Lack of National Loyalty

Jews are often subject to claims that they conspire to shape public policy for Jewish interests, or that their patriotism is less than that of other citizens. This occasionally manifests as claims that Jews, collectively or as individuals, are not loyal to their home countries. To be accepted as national compatriots, Jews are sometimes asked to disavow their connection with Israel, despite the fact that Israel often forms a central part of Jewish identity. This myth can also appear in claims that Jews do not participate proportionally in military service or other public spheres of life in democratic states.

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[6] The preceding paragraph and the examples of myths and stereotypes are taken from *Addressing Anti-Semitism through Education*, pp. 80-83. This UNESCO-OSCE/ODIHR publication is available in several languages at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/383089>.

Media

Allegations of Jewish control over the media have persisted since at least the early 19th century and were repeated in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion.*[7] In the 20th and 21st centuries, individuals of presumed or actual Jewish ancestry, who may have had personal influence as a result of the position they hold within a particular media outlet, have been conflated with claims of general "Jewish control" over the entire media industry. Some groups refer instead to "Zionist control" of the media. The idea asserts that these individuals act together over time in a conspiratorial manner to make decisions, but ignores the fact that many other individuals, who may be similar in some

way, are also employed in the media industry, and that its variety, vastness and constant development make it impossible for it to be controlled in such a way.

World Domination

The pinnacle of the myth of Jews as conspirers is the idea that Jews are plotting to take over the world for their own gain. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,* which remain popular in re-emerging editions in dozens of languages the world over to this day, is perhaps the clearest and best-known example of this theory. Today, the "The Goyim Know" meme is used in social media to perpetuate this, as are memes and articles about lizard people, the Illuminati and the New World Order.

It is notable that the number of reports of anti-Semitic incidents in some OSCE participating States increased during periods of heightened tension in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.[8] This shows importance of understanding that the Jewish people as a whole and Judaism are separate from Israel's actions and the conflicts in the Middle East. When this distinction is not made clear, anger at the current situation in Israel or Palestine risks transforming into anti-Semitism or prejudice against Jewish individuals or the Jewish people in general. Jews and Muslims in the OSCE region are entitled to human rights and to live their lives in dignity and free of fear, discrimination or harassment, irrespective of the policy or behaviour of respective governments in the

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[7] *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is a forged anti-Semitic text which purports to describe a Jewish plan for global domination. It was first published in Russia in 1903 and exposed as clumsy plagiarism in 1921. It has been translated into multiple languages and disseminated internationally since the early part of the 20th century.

[8] For example: Jonathan Boyd and L. Daniel Staetsky, "Could it happen here? What existing data tell us about contemporary antisemitism in the UK", Institute for Jewish Policy Research, May 2015, p. 7, <https://archive.jpr.org.uk/download?id=2227> and "Fragile Mitte-Feindselige Zustände: Rechsextreme Einstellungen in Deutschland 2014", Freidrich Erbert Stiftung, 2014, p. 9, <http://dietz-verlag.de/downloads/leseproben/0458.pdf>.

Middle East. Additionally, holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the government of Israel is unacceptable and also a form of anti-Semitism.

A challenging task for all teachers is to identify offensive incidents of anti-Semitism and distinguish them clearly from criticism of the policies or the government of Israel. Teachers may find it helpful to refer to available definitions when responding to instances of anti-Semitism and other forms of bias.

Here are some questions to consider in relation to whether criticism of Israel is crossing the line into anti-Semitism:

- Are all Jews being held responsible for the actions of Israel?

- Are traditional anti-Semitic symbols, images, stereotypes or theories used?

- Is Israel being blamed for the problems of the world?

- Is Israel being compared to the Nazis, its leaders to Hitler or its actions to the Holocaust?

- Are wild and invented charges being made against Israel and/or Jews, for example, in the form of conspiracy theories?

- Are Jews and/or Israel blamed for the Holocaust or for the continuation of anti-Semitism?

- Are Jews as individuals or Jewish institutions verbally or physically attacked because they are Jewish as a means of protesting against Israel?

In the context of discussions on international developments, including those in the Middle East, it is important to recall that OSCE participating States have, on numerous occasions, reaffirmed the right to peaceful assembly and that the freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and a basic component of a democratic society.

What is Zionism?

Zion is an ancient Hebrew name for Jerusalem that represents the Jewish people's historical and religious connection to the land of Israel. The longing to return to the land of Israel, has been a recurring theme in Jewish prayers over centuries. Political Zionism emerged in the late nineteenth century largely as a response to the rise of other nationalisms and anti-Semitism in Europe, such as the anti-Jewish pogroms in the Russian Empire or the Dreyfus affair in France.* The aim of political Zionism was to establish a Jewish state where Jews could freely express their culture and religion – considered the only way to ensure Jewish survival in the face of mounting threats, despite Jews gaining full rights in some European countries.

Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, political Zionism has been primarily expressed in continued support for Jewish self-determination, maintaining Israel as a safe haven for Jews around the world, and fostering a shared cultural Jewish identity. In time, the term "Zionism" has taken on multiple meanings, contributing to contemporary confusion. Critics of Zionism have called it a colonial or racist ideology,

responsible for the Palestinian refugee crisis that has been ongoing since the State of Israel was created, and for new Jewish settlements in occupied territories. Literally speaking, anti-Zionism means opposition to the idea of Jewish self-determination and to the right to a homeland for Jews in the State of Israel. The term "anti-Zionist" is now sometimes used to mean "pro-Palestinian."

It is important to recognize that advocating for the rights of Palestinians is not anti-Zionist or anti-Semitic. Across the world, there are issues related to inequality, racism, minority rights and refugees. Israel should be called on to respect international laws and standards, as should all other states.

*The Dreyfus affair (1894-1906) concerns a political scandal in which French Army Captain Alfred Dreyfus, of Jewish descent, was falsely convicted of spying for the German government. The case, which gained international attention, shook the French Republic to the point where anti-Semitic riots erupted in more than 20 French cities. For more information, see: Elizabeth Nix, "What was the Dreyfus affair?", History.com, 14 January 2015, <https://www.history.com/news/what-was-the-dreyfus-affair>.

Entering into a discussion about the situation in the Middle East necessitates an educator to have substantial knowledge about the history of the region, the different narratives in circulation, as well as the applicable international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Consider inviting a speaker with this specialised background to discuss the situation in Palestine and other conflicts in the Middle East with your students.

For a side-by-side comparison of Israeli and Palestinian historical narratives, see the booklet on "Learning from each other's historical narrative: Palestinians and Israelis" from the Peace Research Institute in the Middle East: <http://vispo.com/PRIME/narrative.pdf>.

Classroom Strategies for Educating Students about Anti-Semitism, Including in the Context of Discussions that Relate to the Situation in the Middle East

The following section provides some pedagogical tools to support teachers in their efforts to address this complex topic. Courses that allude to political situations, including in the Middle East, may provoke challenging discussions. Such discussions may not be abstract for some or many students in a particular classroom. In this context, it is useful to keep several principles in mind:[9]

- Address group-targeted prejudice – educators can explain that individuals should be held to account for their own actions, but holding individuals responsible for the purported actions of a group of people with whom they may share a characteristic (such as religion) is a form of prejudice;

- Encourage students to consider various points of view – educators can create activities that enable students to view a variety of perspectives about a particular situation or conflict. This will enable students to view events from different points of view and will enable them to process a bigger picture of a political situation before forming their own opinions;

- Explore complexity – while reviewing different perspectives and narratives via a thorough exploration of history, educators can have students identify various aspects of a current situation, not only political ones, and list them on the board;

- Recognize prejudiced or undemocratic approaches – educators can guide students to look at specific social media sites with partners or in groups and answer discussion questions to compare discourse surrounding the situation in the Middle East and to identify anti-Semitic or other stereotypes when present; and

- Counterbalance distorted images – educators can counterbalance biased or distorted images and guide students to analyse media sources and weigh evidence of the validity of their content. They can have students choose two different media sources and compare and contrast how they choose to represent the situation in the Middle East.

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[9] These examples are drawn from *Addressing Anti-Semitism: Why and How? A Guide for Educators*, op. cit.,note 5.

As students utilize critical thinking skills, they will gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of anti-Semitism or other forms of group-focused prejudice, and why the human rights-based approach is so important in addressing them. Consider setting up some "rules of engagement" to initiate the classroom discussion. For guidance on how to set up such rules you may refer to ODIHR's teaching aid no. 5, "Teaching about Anti-Semitism through Holocaust Education".

Anti-bullying educational resources could be an appropriate tool for addressing issues related to harassment in school. This is best addressed as a school-wide project, since behavioural issues may occur as part of a broader school culture. This can be combined with anti-bias education that addresses anti-Semitism, as well as other forms of racism and exclusion, such as gender-based discrimination.

What to do if...?

...a student or teacher is harassed with anti-Israel insults because they are Jewish?

The first thing to do is to protect the victim from further harassment or bullying. If you witness the incident, separate those involved immediately and do not try to mediate on the spot. If there has been bodily injury, seek medical attention. If there has been a physical attack or a threat of violence, follow the official school procedures, which may result in calling the police.

Let the victim know that you see what is happening and that you can be trusted to assist them. If it is a student who has been harassed, their parents should be informed. Follow school policy on responding appropriately to bullying and harassment. If your school policy does not sufficiently enable you to address this incident, then consider raising the policy gap or lack of clarity with your school management.

Once the specific incident has been handled appropriately, there is a need to consider other preventive measures that can be taken to address any underlying factors. It will be helpful to understand what triggered the incident, as well as the background factors, in order to determine the best course of action in the short and long terms.

There may be a need, for example, to expand general understanding of Jewish people or Judaism, to clarify and distinguish explicitly between the actions of a current or past government and the diversity of a group of people who may (or may not) share some religious or cultural elements of identity (see ODIHR teaching aid no. 1, "Increasing Knowledge about Jews and Judaism"). It could also be helpful to refer to the ODIHR teaching aid no. 8, "Dealing with Anti-Semitic Incidents" for guidance on uncovering what lies behind a perpetrator's readiness to commit such acts.

It will be important to ensure through your follow up actions that students understand that it is perfectly legitimate to criticise *the policies of the government of the State of Israel*, just as it is legitimate to criticise the policies of any other state. But that holding Jewish individuals or Jews collectively responsible for the situation in the Middle East, or excluding individuals based only on their Jewish identity, is anti-Semitic and not acceptable.

...a student accuses "the Jews" or Israel of committing crimes similar to those of the Nazis?

Students' anger at global injustice and suffering can sometimes be demonstrated in a display of empathy for a group of people who are suffering. Anger is a normal reaction to injustice, but becomes problematic or dangerous when blame for it is attributed to the Jewish people as a whole or used to justify or minimize the impact of contemporary or historical anti-Semitism. This incident may also, as above, indicate a need, for example, to expand general understanding of the diversity of the Jewish people and those living in Israel, and to clarify and distinguish explicitly between the actions of a current or past government and a group of people who may (or may not) share some religious or cultural elements of identity.

It is important to recognize the students' empathy, acknowledge the suffering and suggest that this is a complex issue. Without minimizing the struggles of any other people or group, it is equally important to convey that the Holocaust is an unparalleled event in history for many reasons.[10] An attempt to minimize the fact that Jews were the targeted victims of this genocide falls into the category of Holocaust distortion or trivialization. The suffering of one group is not negated by that of another.

Draw attention to the difference between murder, mass atrocity and genocide. Understanding the definition and origin of the term "genocide" is crucial. The term was coined in 1943 by the Polish

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[10] For more information about this, see ODIHR's teaching aid no. 6 "Addressing Holocaust Denial, Distortion and Trivialization."

Jewish lawyer, Raphael Lemkin, who combined the Greek word "genos" (race or tribe) with the Latin word "cide" (to kill). Lemkin's efforts paved the way to the adoption of the UN Convention on Genocide in December 1948, which came into effect in January 1951. In the Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed **with intent to destroy**, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group:

- Killing members of the group;

- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;

- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;

- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and

- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."[11]

For more information on genocides past and present, and on the ten stages of genocide for the purpose of situation analysis, visit Genocide Watch: <http://www.genocidewatch.com/ten-stages-of-genocide>.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) convicted a number of people for the genocide which took place in 1994. The 1995 massacre at Srebrenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been ruled a genocide by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

...a student says that Israel should be wiped off the map?

This phrase has been attributed to different leaders across the Middle East at various moments in history. The phrase led to newspaper headlines across the world in 2005, though experts have noted that the remarks in question were not translated accurately from the original language.[12] Other forms of contemporary anti-Semitism

question the legitimacy of the State of Israel , which for many Jews also threatens their right to self-determination.

The statement may reveal more extreme anti-Semitism, or it may have been repeated as a provocation in class, to get attention. It may also indicate an interest in international politics related to the situation in the Middle East and its coverage in the media. The response to it should be shaped by the motivation and influences driving the statement. It could be informative to explore the statement further, while taking care not to give extremist views a credible voice in class. The answers will help you to determine how deeply rooted this person's belief is in a particular ideology, political agenda or prejudice. Once you have more clarity

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[11] United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Article II (9 December 1948), <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%2078/volume-78-i-1021-english.pdf>.

[12] For more information, see Jonathan Steele (2006), "Lost in translation", *The Guardian*, London, United Kingdom, 14 June 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/jun/14/post155>.

as to the underlying causes of this statement, it will be easier to decide what kind of follow-up would be most appropriate.

Anti-Semitic propaganda circulated online is a key source for these manifestations of anti-Semitism. Try to have a private conversation with this student to better understand what underpins her or his beliefs and what sources the student might be engaging with. In certain OSCE countries, it may be necessary for the student(s) to be made aware that some forms of hate speech are punishable as criminal offences.

You may also decide that it is most appropriate not to give the student an opportunity to expand on her or his views. But it is important to let the class know that statements like these, which essentially call for violence or war, will not be tolerated. The statement, and other students' reaction to it, can be an indication that a deliberate and phased approach is needed to address anti-Semitism in the classroom.

Educators should guide students to develop media and information literacy competences, which will enable them to identify and reject anti-Semitic representations, extremist claims and conspiracy theories or calls to reject democratic values. It is important that learners be able to identify these elements as such, even against a background of emotional imagery or reference to suffering. Media and information literacy helps to build learners' critical thinking skills and resilience to the allure of simplistic explanations. Explore with colleagues how your school can:

• Guide students to develop the skill sets needed to weigh evidence and discern which

information can be trusted on the basis of verifiable research or objective logic; and

• Assess and evaluate students' safe usage of the Internet to understand and target skill and knowledge deficits.

Activity

Introduce your students to the United Nations system, explaining that it was established as a way to maintain international peace and security, including by suppressing acts of aggression and settling international disputes through peaceful means, as a response to the mass destruction and vast loss of life during World War II.

It is now a basic principle under international law that states may not use force against the "territorial integrity or political independence" of another state and the 193 UN Member States agreed to this and to finding peaceful solutions to their disagreements.*

*See, Article 2 (3) and (4) in Chapter I of the Charter of the United Nations of 1945, at: <https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-i/index.html>; and Chapter IV (Territorial integrity of States) of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, to which all OSCE participating States have committed themselves, <https://www.osce.org/helsinki-final-act?download=true>

Resources and Materials for Further Reading

For a list of resources on the different streams of Zionism, their history and development, see Derek Penslar, *Zionism from Its Inception to 1948*, Oxford Bibliographies, www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199840731/obo-9780199840731-0006.xml.

For a comprehensive bibliography of background information sources, see the Yale Library's Research Guide to Middle Eastern Politics: www.library.yale.edu/neareast/politics1.html.

For information on Jews and Zionism, see the website of The Anne Frank House – Topics: www.annefrank.org/en/topics/antisemitism/are-all-jews-zionists.

For positive examples of personal friendships between individuals from opposing sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, see Chapter 6 (Amal and Odelia) in *Teaching Materials to Combat Anti-Semitism*, "Part 2: Anti-Semitism: a never-ending struggle?", published by ODIHR and the Anne Frank House: www.osce.org/odihr/24568?download=true.

The following resources provide support for engaging with the Middle East conflict in class:

"Living with Controversy – Teaching Controversial Issues Through Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights", Council of Europe, www.theewc.org/Content/Library/Teacher-Training/Training-Tools/Living-with-Controversy-Teaching-Controversial-Issues-Through-Education-for-Democratic-Citizenship-and-Human-Rights-EDC-HRE.

For a comparison of Israeli and Palestinian narratives, see: "Learning Each Other's Historical Narratives: Palestinians and Israelis", Peace Research Institute in the Middle East: http://vispo.com/PRIME/leohn1.pdf.

For material on genocides and their stages, see "The Ten Stages of Genocide", Genocide Watch: www.genocidewatch.com/ten-stages-of-genocide.

For lesson plans available in several languages, see the website of the American Public Broadcasting Service PBS:

- On the dilemma of protecting free speech (specific to the United States): www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/lessons-plans/the-dilemma-of-protecting-free-speech;

- On making a difference in the midst of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/for-educators/making-a-difference-in-the-midst-of-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict-lesson-overview/6004; and

- On the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Summit: www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/educators/nations/lesson3.html.

For further guidance on addressing manifestations of anti-Semitism in educational settings, see Chapter Five of: *Addressing Anti-Semitism Through Education: Guidelines for Policymakers* (Warsaw: ODIHR and UNESCO, 2018), www.osce.org/odihr/383089.