

SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT

# An Ecosystem of Approaches

ADDRESSING ANTISEMITISM,  
ISLAMOPHOBIA, AND  
RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

Applied Research  
Center for Civility

UC San Diego



## SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT

# Impact of the Violence in Israel-Palestine on Organizations Addressing Antisemitism, Islamophobia and Religious Intolerance

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# Impact of the Violence in Israel-Palestine on Organizations Addressing Antisemitism, Islamophobia and Religious Intolerance

The Applied Research Center for Civility conducted research to better understand the strategies and best practices of organizations working to address religious intolerance and discrimination, with a specific focus on antisemitism and Islamophobia. The research project began in July 2022 and included a survey of organizations, interviews with representatives from organizations, a review of publicly available resources and toolkits, analysis and presentation of corresponding data in a full report, and the presentation of findings at a conference held in September 2024. The full report details the landscape of efforts to reduce religious intolerance and ameliorate the harms of hate and bias. The conflict in Israel and Palestine has placed great stress on organizations working in the field of religious intolerance and bigotry, and it is a context that organizations are still working to navigate. While our project looked at the strategies employed by organizations over the long term, this supplemental report addresses the specific challenges and lessons learned from this current moment of crisis. Even though most organizations we spoke to are working exclusively in the United States, global events can have large impacts on their work. Impacts of the current violence in Israel-Palestine have ranged from strained relationships to shifts in available funding to the derailment of long-term strategies.

## Strain and Breakdown of Relationships

As we highlight in the full report, many initiatives to combat religious intolerance focus on building relationships or coalitions and working across differences, often of faith or ideology. Many interviewees shared that prior to October 7, 2023, the conflict in Israel-Palestine was more easily avoided in organizational relationships or coalitions. This often meant that partnering organizations would not engage with the conflict in their work together. However, as several interviewees explained, the avoidance of constructive conversation around Israel-Palestine led those relationships to fall apart when avoiding the conflict was no longer an option. Some have decided to continue working together with an understanding that they may disagree on certain issues, whereas others have decided that they can no longer work together. For example, a number of organizations that organized interfaith Iftars in the past decided not to have Iftars this year either because of disagreement between organizers or because they felt that communities needed time to themselves. Interviewees shared that even within their organizations there was occasional infighting among board members or employees caused by disagreement over how the organizations should function in this moment.

## Keeping coalitions intact requires intentional effort on the part of organizations.



Alicia Williams, the Hate Crimes Coordinator at the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of California, and Abigail Dillon, the Deputy District Attorney of the Special Operations Division in the San Diego County District Attorney's Office, co-chair the San Diego Anti-Hate Crime Coalition. The coalition, made up of law enforcement agencies and community groups, has continued their monthly meetings since October 7 while other coalitions and networks have discontinued their meetings or lost members. The success of the San Diego Anti-Hate Crime Coalition comes down to several factors including the representation of diverse perspectives on the board, the coalition's focus on domestic issues, and a "civility pledge" that they require of all their participating members. The civility pledge supports their continued work through clear standards for communication. "We try not to have the coalition drift in to that [Israel-Palestine] discussion", Abigail Dillon explained, "we very much limit our involvement to how do we reduce hate in our community." The fact that Williams and Dillon, as representatives of the US government, cannot take a stance on issues related to the conflict allows them to direct the conversation as co-chairs toward shared values and concerns. Yet despite these efforts, the recent violence in Israel-Palestine has had an impact. In some cases, they have had to cancel or reschedule events while some relationships have cooled between members of the coalition who, although still participating in the coalition, may no longer collaborate on events or programming. As Williams put it, "people who shared the stage last year may not share a stage this year."

The strain on, if not dissolution of, many of these relationships has hurt the wider field of combating hate, building peace, and fostering tolerance and inclusion. One interviewee sums up the impact on relationships for the wider field: "there's been increasing strains on coalition building between groups that take different stances on the conflict ... And that has been quite painful to watch. Because for one, it's just sad and stressful. And two, it makes the work harder at a really important time for our country." The breakdown of partnerships and working relationships between individuals and organizations was the most frequently mentioned impact of the current violence in Israel-Palestine.

### Increased Burnout

Most people we spoke to who are working to combat religious intolerance and related forms of bigotry are doing this work because of a commitment to making the world a better place by reducing hate and discrimination. This work is very challenging, however, and progress made is neither linear nor fast. As a result, burnout levels are high even in times of relative peace. As one organizational leader explained, "Burnout, it's tough. It's tough to be surrounded by so much negativity...and everyone has their own kind of coping mechanism, but burnout is endemic." Crises like the current violence in Israel-Palestine have only exacerbated the challenges of doing this work.

Interviewees spoke about experiencing loneliness, pain, and grief since October 7. Some interviewees felt alienated from certain communities they are a part of because of stances their organization did or did not take. Several Jewish interviewees said that after the start of the Israel/Hamas war, they had never felt so alone in doing the work. They felt that they were a part of progressive spaces and supported other calls to action, such as Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate, but in this moment, they feel like they are not getting the same support from others. Times of intensified conflict and crisis can even lead to what one organization leader described as “moral disengagement.” As they explained, “When there’s a polarizing issue, people have the opportunity to morally disengage and say, ‘Ah, I’ve been freed of the shackles of good behavior, I’m allowed to act however I want towards this person.’” For people working to combat religious intolerance, this can mean attacks on their work, their character, and even their person as attitudes and behaviors that were widely decried as unacceptable in the past become normalized. Under these conditions, burnout has spread further and deeper.

## Funding

Funding is already one of the biggest hurdles for organizations in the field and impacts their work in many ways. As one interviewee said, “Funders have a lot of power and a really disproportionate power in defining what the scope of an organization’s work can be based on what they can get.” The heightened fears and instability due to the violence in Israel-Palestine and the response to the war in the United States has shifted individual funding behaviors and the funding landscape, more generally.

Some organizations had individuals stop giving donations to them because of the organization’s response to the violence in Israel-Palestine. Others felt pressure from larger funders to either put out certain statements or refrain from doing so for fear of losing support. On the other hand, some organizations have had more donations, presumably because funders perceive this to be a time of intense need in the fight against antisemitism and/or Islamophobia. Organizations that received an increase in funding shared that much of that funding was going towards increasing staffing capacity and building out services. However, some organizations that host in-person events have felt the need to pay for armed security guards at their events due to threats they’ve received as an organization during this time of increased bigotry, diverting much needed resources.

Finally, several organizations we interviewed shared with us that some people shifted their donations to the support of Israel rather than programming that was addressing antisemitism locally in the United States. Other organizations may be responding to the interests of donors by shifting resources to the region. One organization we spoke to had begun directing their efforts to support Israel and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) by using funds from donors to purchase tactical gear, such as bulletproof vests and helmets, for IDF soldiers. With limited resources, organizations need to balance the interests and needs of their constituents, which can mean redirecting efforts in times of crisis. Overall, the current international crisis and its domestic impact are influencing funding patterns and donor behaviors which will not only impact the work happening currently but will shape strategic plans for years to come.



## Increase in Need and Real-Time Test of Work

For some organizations, the attention brought to antisemitism and Islamophobia in the United States as a consequence of the recent violence in Israel-Palestine has led to more work. Many organizations discussed a large increase in requests for their programming or support with some interviewees sharing that they've had between 600%-1000% increase in requests.

Since the Israel/Hamas war began, for example, the Institute for Islamic, Christian, and Jewish Studies has served as a trusted convener of difficult interreligious conversations and has had regional secondary schools, university administrations, government agencies, leadership groups, and other organizations reach out to them to lead workshops. These workshops aim to both combat religious bigotry (specifically antisemitism and Islamophobia) and facilitate hard conversations. In these workshops participants can have conversations where they can openly recognize their hurt, pain, and anger together, and grieve together, and recommit to confronting religious bigotry. Rather than presenting educational materials on antisemitism and Islamophobia to a general audience, the Institute has focused on creating in-person dialogue spaces for a collective processing of the ongoing crisis between coworkers and colleagues, people who are not unacquainted with one another.

Organizations have also had to respond quickly to their communities' needs by creating new resources, events, or offerings. For example, OneTable compiled helpful

resources and developed a new resource exemplifying why the practice of Shabbat was especially timely: "After October 7, the world has needed Shabbat more than ever. Shabbat is here, week after week, as our constant reminder of all we need reminding of: to slow down, to engage across differences, to seek out comfort, to express ourselves, to open ourselves up, to provide ourselves a respite, to connect to others and ourselves across time." In the collection of other helpful resources, they have provided several prayers, resources for learning and reflection, and resources for taking action.

This moment has also been a real-time test of the previous work and training that organizations have done. In addition to new requests for services organizations are receiving, some organizations have also tried to develop support for those that have been involved in their programming in the past. Sometimes this meant making staff members available for one-on-one conversations with past clients or coalition members, and other times it consisted of facilitating a group space, often virtually, for past clients to come together and work through the challenges of doing this work in this moment. One interviewee whose organization provides skills-based training said that this moment has helped them understand the progress they've made in their work to equip individuals with skills for handling conflict and difficult conversations as well as throwing into relief where more work needs to be done in the future.

**Some organizations reported a staggering 600%-1000% increase in requests for support.**

## Direction Away from Long-Term Strategies and Addressing White Nationalism

While the recent violence in Israel-Palestine has led to increased requests for time and commitment from organizations working on antisemitism and Islamophobia, these requests are often tied to the current moment and therefore direct resources away from long-term strategies. Additionally, with the increase in requests, many organizations that provide education or training have had to create “band aid” offerings that are shorter, less intensive, and one-off rather than their preferred in-depth, longer-term offerings. These responses to the current moment disrupt the work of organizations that may have been focused on longer strategies for combatting these forms of bigotry. Ultimately, the violence in Israel-Palestine is directing attention away from extremism in the United States. As Corey Saylor, the Director of the Research and Advocacy department at CAIR, explained, “the winners right now are the white supremacists.”

**White nationalist and Christian nationalist organizations are using the violence in Israel-Palestine to recruit new members and to divide communities.**

This is a well-established strategy of anti-democracy organizing whereby they inject themselves into crisis moments to sow division.<sup>1</sup> As the Bard Center for the Study of Hate explains in their manual on combatting hate, hate groups “use the divisions and ideas that already exist in our communities to propel their agendas”.<sup>2</sup> In some cases, white nationalists have exploited this crisis to spread antisemitism by joining pro-Palestinian protestors and conflating their messages. This strategy has been used by members of the National Justice Party (NJP), National Socialist Movement, Nationalist Social Club (NSC-131), White Lives Matter (WLM), and the Goyim Defense League (WSC), among others. During a protest in a small town outside of Orlando, for example, members of National Socialist Florida protested with signs that read “Our Tax Dollars Fund Israeli Bloodlust” and “The Great Replacement is Real”.<sup>3</sup> White nationalist groups have also distributed flyers in communities to spread both antisemitism and Islamophobia, trying to pit the communities against each other. As Rachel Carroll Rivas from the SPLC explained, “we documented the Goyim Defense League putting up flyers that are antisemitic and putting up flyers that are pro-Palestinian. And they are anti-Muslim. Like they're absolutely anti-Muslim. And in their chats, they're saying, 'Isn't this great?' They're doing this on purpose.” These methods exploit the current moment to create division between Muslim American and Jewish American communities, and to recruit members to their anti-democratic causes.





## The Turn Toward Campuses

College and university campuses became primary sites of contestation over the war and concerns about antisemitism and Islamophobia. Higher education came under political pressure, experienced large-scale protests, and faced intense public scrutiny. College campuses also became spaces where students felt unsafe due to their political opinions. In a comprehensive study of campus fears after October 7, 2023, the Chicago Project on Security and Threats at the University of Chicago (CPOST) found that 56% of Jewish college students and 52% of Muslim college students felt in personal danger as a consequence of their opinions about Israel/Hamas war.<sup>4</sup>

Many higher education leaders confronted conflicting demands on them and their organizations, and their responses to one challenge often undermined or complicated their responses to others. One approach to addressing the crisis of the war and the tensions that followed was to create or reimagine programs to support dialogue and understanding across the campus community. The University of California San Diego (UCSD), for example, created Tritons Belong: Understanding and Compassion in Challenging Times, a series of in-person and virtual events. UCSD partnered with the National Conflict Resolution Center, American Civil Liberties Union, Anti-Defamation League, and Islamic Networks Group to deliver webinars on dialogue, free speech, antisemitism, and Islamophobia.

Other schools incorporated education or discussion about Israel and Palestine into existing programs. For instance, Dartmouth College's Dialogue Project invited speakers to discuss the war and model challenging conversations for the campus community. Dickinson College organized dialogues focused on Israel and Palestine between campus groups and the community as part of

their Dialogues Across Differences (DXD) program. At Dickinson College, student dialogue coordinators (SDCs) worked with two professors and students in a learning-community centered around Israel-Palestine relationships. The classes had a discussion with two members of the Parents Circle–Family Forum (PCFF) which is “a joint Israeli-Palestinian organization of over 700 families, all of whom have lost an immediate family member to the ongoing conflict.”<sup>5</sup> The SDCs then led dialogues with the students regarding their own experiences with community and belonging, which allowed participants to view their conversation with PCFF through a new lens. Two professors taught classes, one centered on women in the Middle East and the struggles women face there and the other class focused on women and gender in Judaism and the relationship between the more conservative views on women in religious texts and the advancements of women's liberation. The classes gathered twice to watch relevant films and the SDCs facilitated a dialogue regarding mutual understanding and the common theme of transnational feminism.

In April 2024, Interfaith America brought together university presidents, chancellors, deans, provosts, and other senior administrators for a conference on fostering campus pluralism in response to rising antisemitism and Islamophobia in the U.S. and the ongoing conflicts on campus over the violence in Israel-Palestine. Efforts like these have emerged across the country to try and address and prevent bias and hate in the wake of the violence in Israel-Palestine. However, this work is made more challenging by tensions surrounding on-campus protests, which many campuses have struggled to respond to in a way that lessens those tensions or supports programs intended to build community through understanding and a shared sense of belonging.



## Lessons Learned in Challenging Times

In our interviews with organizations, many participants reflected on what strategies and practices helped them to continue doing their work and to respond to increased need following the onset of the Israel/Hamas war in October 2023. During our interviews, individuals expressed that they are still trying to figure out how to navigate this work in a time of uncertainty, fear, and hurt. Based on those conversations, we have compiled several practices that supported organizations to continue doing this work in this challenging time.

### Take a Trauma-Informed Approach

Many interviewees stressed the need to show up for others with deep empathy, radical curiosity, and an authentic desire for connecting as humans who are grieving and in pain. As one interviewee said, trust building can emerge when a person is able to say to another “I see you as a whole human being and all of your heartbreak and I’m not trying to minimize that or make it go away. Here are the other things I’m seeing, and I’m not asking you to necessarily do anything other than be open to hearing this.” One way of taking a trauma-informed approach is to focus more on one-on-one relationships and interactions. Some interviewees shared that in this time they found it more productive to shift the focus on intergroup work and instead focus more on intracommunity relationships. Other interviewees felt it was more important than ever to work in partnership with others across communities to treat the underlying conditions that create these bigotries. In either case, a trauma-informed approach will be supportive.

### Take a Measured Response

This work has been extremely dynamic since this recent violence in Israel-Palestine began. One interviewee said that, in this time, they are cautioning against making any permanent decisions about how they do this work in the future based on what they are seeing and how they feel in the present moment. They continued by saying “we’re in the middle of the traumatic impacts of a war and the stresses and pressures that that is putting on so many people. It may not be the indicator of what this work will be like next year.” Responding in a timely manner to the needs of the community is incredibly important but trying to do this while also considering the long-term goals and strategies of an organization is key.

## Consider the Impacts and Needs of Taking Public Stances

When asked about the impacts of the violence in Israel-Palestine, most interviewees discussed the statements and public stances their organization has made or the reasons why they did not take a public stance. During these conversations, they also talked about the consequences and divisions that often result from taking or not taking public stances, which include changes in funding support, staff and board member turnover, and changes in partnerships.

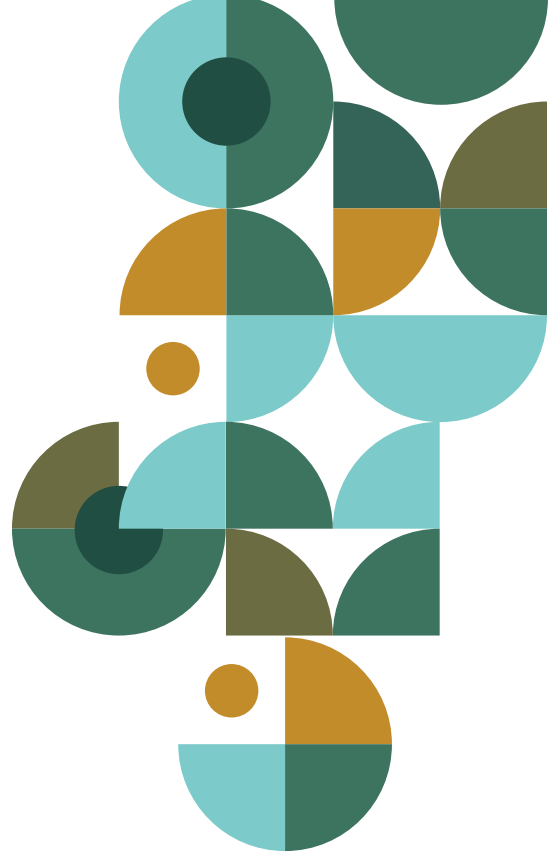
Some organizations and coalitions have agreed upon requirements to be a part of the coalition that allows for member organizations to still work together if they disagree on certain issues and stances. In this current political climate and the ever-changing dynamics, a requirement that is based on a single shared goal can be productive for staying focused on their collective mission. Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign, for example, has a mandate that to be a member of their group you are committed to addressing anti-Muslim discrimination in the United States. They do not ask people to agree to many requirements and stances, but having this one requirement has helped them stay focused and has allowed them to continue working together in polarizing moments.

Other organizations refrained from making statements about the violence in Israel-Palestine because their organization's mission focuses on local or national issues. For example, Jewish Community Action (JCA) does not take stances on international events, including Israel and Palestine. While this has led some people to assume JCA's position on the war and created some push back from the Jewish community, it

has also enabled the organization to maintain relationships with their partner organizations and allies in the community. By not taking a stance that could alienate some in the community, JCA can focus on working toward their common goals. As the JCA representative we spoke to explained, work with communities is not just about political stances. Rather, "when you're working in relationship with each other, and you're there for each other in moments of crisis, you can withstand even greater moments of crisis." Relationships built on political stances – rather than collaboration on community needs and goals – are on shakier ground since crises can strain or alter those political stances. Organizations focused on community work are continuing to collaborate and do that work regardless of the political views of individuals.

Like JCA, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) has not made a public statement on the violence in Israel-Palestine, reminding their donors and supporters that their work is domestic and so precludes taking public stances on wars between government entities outside of the United States. Despite this stance, they have received calls and requests from supporters on both sides of the conflict to label organizations as Hate Groups within their work. Nevertheless, they have refused to do so based on their existing typology and their domestic focus. This does not preclude them, however, from working on issues in the United States such as the right to protest and the right not to feel afraid to engage in public. While the SPLC has remained neutral, the SPLC Union has taken a public stance by stating that they "stand strongly in solidarity with the Palestinian people".<sup>6</sup>

While many organizations that we spoke to emphasize the need for moderation, some explicitly expressed the need to take a firm public stance in support of a position on the Israel/Hamas war. This alternative does come with risks, although it is an effective strategy for some organizations. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has taken a firm stance in support of Israel. Similarly, CAIR has taken a vocal and public stance in support of Palestinians. This firm positioning allows these organizations to provide support, develop research, and write reports that directly address issues related to the conflict, while organizations that remain neutral cannot write such reports. This approach does not come without consequences, however. The organization may no longer receive funding from sources that wish to remain neutral, for example, and individual employees may be harassed or threatened due to their organization's public position.



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<sup>1</sup> Western States Center. n.d. "Speaking Out Against Bigoted," 5.

<sup>2</sup> Bard College's Center for the Study of Hate. 2022. "Opposing Hate: A Toolkit for Combating Extremism in Your Community," 6. Bard College. <https://bcsh.bard.edu/files/2022/05/OpposingHateGuide-single-pages-8M-5-3.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Western States Center. n.d. "Speaking Out Against Bigoted," 6.

<sup>4</sup> Chicago Project on Security and Threats. 2024. "Understanding Campus Fears After October 7 and How to Reduce Them." Chicago, IL: University of Chicago. [https://cpost.uchicago.edu/publications/cpost\\_understanding\\_campus\\_fears\\_after\\_october\\_7\\_and\\_how\\_to\\_reduce\\_them/](https://cpost.uchicago.edu/publications/cpost_understanding_campus_fears_after_october_7_and_how_to_reduce_them/).

<sup>5</sup> Parents Circle-Families Forum. n.d. "About PCFF." Parents Circle-Families Forum. [https://www.theparentscircle.org/en/about\\_eng-2/](https://www.theparentscircle.org/en/about_eng-2/).

<sup>6</sup> SPLCUnion. 2023. "A message from SPLC Union officers and stewards: SPLC Union is and will always be rooted in the legacy of anti-oppression and decolonization led by Black and Indigenous leaders. With that in mind, SPLC Union stands strongly in solidarity with the Palestinian people." X, October 18, 2023. <https://x.com/SPLCUnion/status/1714710978732995057>.