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Herzog, Edelstein: Not all Israel criticism is antisemitism

• By TAMARA ZIEVE

It's important to differentiate between antisemitism and legitimate criticism of Israel, Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein and opposition leader Isaac Herzog said Sunday night at the opening of an international conference on antisemitism at Bar-Ilan University.

The conference marked the 20th anniversary of the passing of Israel's sixth president, Chaim Herzog, Isaac Herzog's father. Participants watched a screening of then-ambassador to the UN Herzog's famous speech to the United Nations in 1975, in which he ripped up the "Zionism is Racism" resolution, reminiscent of his father, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yitzhak HaLevi Herzog, who tore up the British White Paper of 1939 that restricted Jewish immigration to British Mandate Palestine. Chaim Herzog's speech went down as one of the greatest speeches in history, alongside those of Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr.

Herzog recalled the emotional reactions to his father speech, which was delivered when he was a high school student. Speaking on the same day as the Paris peace parley convened, however, Herzog stressed that not every disagreement with or vote against Israel is antisemitic.

"We need to separate antisemitism and political disputes," he said, noting that if he were in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's shoes, he would have attended the Paris conference and explained Israel's position there. Overuse of the term antisemitism, he said, is disrespectful to the true meaning of the word.

Herzog agreed with Edelstein, who spoke before him and said the subject is not black and white. He said while classic antisemitism still exists and "doesn't seem like it will disappear anytime soon," and new antisemitism has joined it, he too emphasized that "not all criticism of Israel is antisemitism." There is the tendency to disguise antisemitism with anti-Zionism,



CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS pose for a photo at Bar-Ilan University on Sunday. From left: Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein, opposition leader Isaac Herzog, WZO vice chairman Yaakov Hagoel and Dahan Center director Shimon Ohayon. (Peleg Levy)

he said, accusing perpetrators of the latter of a "copy paste" of classic antisemitism – changing the word "Jewish" to "Zionist."

"But it's important for me to say, the world is not against us," he added.

He said that Jews hold senior positions around the world and don't feel the need to hide their identity. "Nonetheless, we cannot close our eyes, and we have to admit there is antisemitism," he added.

"We must also remember that this battle is not just on our shoulders," he said, adding that the governments of those countries where antisemitism exists are also responsible for fighting it, "because all citizens are equal."

The conference was organized by Bar-Ilan's Dahan Center for Culture, Society and Education in the Sephardic Heritage and the World Zionist Organization.

"The fight against antisemitism must be fought across the board – from parliamentary legislation in Israel and around the world to vigorous public diplomacy programs that train our people to stand up to the virulent hatred being espoused across college campuses around

the world, including the United States," said Shimon Ohayon, director of the Dahan Center and a former MK who, together with WZO vice chairman Yaakov Hagoel, led the Knesset lobby against antisemitism. "Our greatest weakness lies in our inability to fight back against the massive hate machine."

Hagoel stressed that the World Zionist Organization will "continue to stand firmly against acts of antisemitism which are increasing every year in both frequency and violence. Antisemitism has become routine in Diaspora Jewish communities such that Jewish identity is threatened, Jewish symbols are concealed and fear of violent antisemitism is heightened.

"In an era of global terror blended with deep antisemitism, at a time when the Internet is a free platform for spreading hatred, our commitment to combating this phenomenon alongside our brethren in the Diaspora is reinforced," he said. "This is a test of our unity: Israel is faced with rising antisemitism which hides its cruel face under all kinds of euphemisms and mixed messages."