



2833 Smith Ave Ste 225
Baltimore, MD 21209

t 301.727.2700
f 410.602.1351
www.cjvalues.org
office@cjvalues.org

Rabbi Pesach Lerner
President

Rabbi Yoel Schonfeld
Vice-President

Rabbi Avrohom Gordimer
Chairman, Rabbinic Circle

Rabbi Dov Fischer
Western Regional VP

Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Midwestern Regional VP

Rabbi Moshe B. Parnes
Southern Regional VP

Rabbi Steven Pruzansky
Israel Regional VP

Rabbi Yaakov Menken
Managing Director

28 Kislev 5781
December 14, 2020

Jewish Democratic Council of America
777 North Capitol St NE # 305
Washington, DC 20002

Warnock for Georgia
PO Box 991
Decatur, GA 30031

Dear Sirs and Mesdames,

We appreciated hearing Rev. Raphael Warnock present his views and defend his record at last week's "Jewish Community Conversation" sponsored by the Jewish Democratic Council of America (JDCA). But we are concerned and hurt by the manner in which the Reverend brushed aside his past rhetoric against Israel and the Jewish community, and even blamed his opponents for "trying to use Israel as yet another wedge issue."

We have also seen the letter circulated by the JDCA for rabbis and cantors to sign, asserting that Rev. Warnock has been subjected to "baseless claims and attacks" intended to "divide the Black and Jewish communities, and to divide the Jewish community." Yet the fact that partisan clergy sign a letter does not, unfortunately, mean its words are true.

It is not just his political opponents, but anyone troubled by rising Antisemitism in America, who should be alarmed by Rev. Warnock's past statements. To term these serious concerns "baseless" is irresponsible.

For example, Rev. Warnock said on Tuesday that "I do not believe Israel is an apartheid state, as some have suggested," and the JDCA letter quotes from an op-ed by Rev. Warnock in which he says that claims he believes otherwise are "patently false." This is fortunate. To liken a country in which Jews and Arabs share seats in government and at the Supreme Court to a country in which Blacks and Whites did not share hospital rooms, classrooms or even bathrooms is to make a despicable comparison – and one redolent with Antisemitic bias.

But the one who "suggested" that he does indeed harbor this bigoted view is Rev. Warnock himself. He signed a [Group Pilgrimage Statement](#) of leaders from historic black denominations of the National Council of Churches after visiting Israel in early 2019 – a statement that claimed

that their experience with “dehumanizing dispossession, colonialism, segregation and apartheid” provided relevant context, compared the “heavy militarization of the West Bank” to “the military occupation of Namibia by apartheid South Africa” and claimed that the “laws of segregation... allow one thing for the Jewish people and another for the Palestinians.”

The notion that Jews, as a collective, are stealing from and taking advantage of others is a hallmark of classical Antisemitism. In the leaders’ statement, use of this ancient, bigoted trope is built upon the ahistorical and offensive fiction that immigrants from Arabia are the “indigenous” inhabitants of Judea. Their statement both found fault with defensive Israeli efforts to prevent terrorist atrocities, and claimed that the Palestinian Authority “had made a conscious decision to forgo armed solutions.” In reality, the Palestinian Authority provides a generous “[pay to slay](#)” bounty to families of terrorists, and names entire schools after [murderers of Jewish children](#) – to call this “non-violent” is a contemptible whitewash.

Contrary to Rev. Warnock’s condemnation of BDS on Tuesday, the statement also references “the need to preserve the option of utilizing economic pressure” – justifying the bigoted Arab boycott created in 1945 (and relaunched as “BDS” sixty years later) in the model of the German boycott of 1932 and thousands of years of similar “economic pressure” against Jews.

In fact, the statement’s reference to silence of Christians during apartheid, slavery and the Holocaust could easily be read to infer that the behavior of Jews in Israel is somehow comparable to that of South African whites, slaveowners, or even Nazis. Such a dystopian vision can only be attributed to Antisemitism. The same Jews falsely accused of [poisoning the water](#) during the Black Plague are falsely accused of leaving Arabs “struggling for water” today. The modern version is no more true, no less vile, and no less deadly.

Similarly, Rev. Warnock acknowledged “some comment about a sermon I gave in May of 2018.” He then said, “I’m a pastor. I preach every Sunday. I preach a lot of sermons. And I think that as I recall that sermon, I was speaking to the issue of activists and human rights and the ability of people to be heard.”

This non-answer is frightening. How was speaking about human rights and being heard relevant to his claim that “we saw the government of Israel shoot down unarmed Palestinian sisters and brothers like birds of prey?”

We must say this openly: Rev. Warnock misused his pulpit to bear false witness. He saw no such thing, because it never happened. Each and every element of his statement was false, defamatory, and bigoted. He libeled an army that does more to [avoid civilian casualties](#) than any other, and a country whose generosity with its medical expertise (before and during the current pandemic) continues to [save Arab lives](#) across the Middle East. To knowledgeable Jews, it is obvious why he did so; we have thousands of years of experience with hateful rhetoric of this nature, and the deadly consequences of allowing it to flourish uncontested.

And thus we must ask: when, and in what circumstance, did Rev. Warnock reject his aforementioned previous, hateful positions? Only a fool, or someone callously unconcerned for the safety of Israel and the Jewish community, would grant credence to what he says on the campaign trail today to Jewish audiences, over what he said just a year ago in front of his own, supportive congregation.

Did he, in an apolitical context, renounce the Antisemitic rhetoric found in the Group Pilgrimage Statement, and remove his signature? Did he retract his lie that Israeli soldiers shoot Arab children at will? Has he acknowledged openly that his statements regarding Israel were false and slanderous, and naturally incited hatred against Jews?

We hope to hear from you that there is clear and compelling evidence that Rev. Warnock renounced these positions before seeking public office. Otherwise, it remains clear that placing him in a position of power would be playing a dangerous gamble with history's longest form of hate.

Yours Sincerely,

Rabbi Ilan Feldman
Rabbi, Congregation Beth Jacob
Atlanta, GA

Rabbi Avigdor Slatius
Rabbi, Congregation Bnai Brith Jacob
Savannah, GA

Rabbi Pesach Lerner
President, Coalition for Jewish Values
Queens, NY

Rabbi Moshe Parnes
Southern Regional Vice-President, CJV
Hollywood, FL