

THE ISRAEL PROJECT

**COMBATING ANTI-SEMITISM AND ANTI-ZIONISM AMONG U.S.
HISPANICS IN LATIN AMERICA**

WELCOME:

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SPEAKER:

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JENNIFER MIZRAHI: Thank you, and good morning or good afternoon, depending on what time zone you're calling in from. This is Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, founder and president of The Israel Project. The Israel Project, as you know, is a nonprofit educational organization that provides factual information about Israel and the Middle East press, policy makers and the public.

It is my honor, in fact, my delight, to introduce Leah Soibel, who is the director of our newly-launched Spanish-language media program. She's a five-year veteran of The Israel Project; previously served as our senior adviser for research and communications in Jerusalem. Her work has been published regularly in our press releases, backgrounders and fact sheets read by thousands of journalists around the world.

She's put her life literally at risk several times working for The Israel Project by getting the journalists facts, even when she was on the front lines during Israel's defensive wars – in 2006 against Hezbollah and in 2008 against Hamas in Gaza. She's worked at bomb shelters. She's worked in all kinds of difficult situations. She is extraordinarily talented. She is also a former intelligence professional. She is fluent in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Hebrew, Arabic, and reads Farsi. She's an outstanding professional, one of the brightest people of her generation.

Leah Soibel, I turn it over to you to give us an overview of what's going on in the Spanish language world.

LEAH SOIBEL: Thank you, Jennifer.

Thank you, for all of you – those that have called in today.

I want to speak about the importance of communicating Israel's message and the message of the Jewish people through the Spanish media today, because the fact of the matter is, is those that aren't communicating in Spanish through the Spanish language media just aren't getting their messages heard. I think those of us that have been paying attention to the recent elections last week in the United States really realized the growing influence – or the power of the Spanish-language media, particularly the U.S. Hispanic media, and the effects that it had on those elections.

It's been some time now that the Spanish-language media has been growing in terms of its outreach – in the number of stations, in the number of television channels. The number of publications have always remained big, but now, with the proliferation of technology, those are also increasing. What we're seeing today, and what we saw just last week with the elections, was the power that these channels had, not only in the sense of being able to promote agendas and to assist a democracy, take its pulse, but, in essence, to be able to present their messages in Spanish throughout the United States and the Spanish-language world.

Now, I'd like to preface what I'm about to say, stating that The Israel Project does not endorse any candidate whatsoever, neither Democratic nor Republican. We are a nonpartisan organization. But I do want to raise your attention to the fact that there were many non-Hispanic candidates in the recent election that held debates purposely in the major Spanish television

networks because they realized the importance of reaching out in Spanish to the Spanish-language audiences. We even saw that President Obama gave an interview on Univision, which is supposed to be one of the most – and probably is the most influential Spanish-language television network within the Northern Hemisphere.

And so all of these facts give us the realization that Spanish-language media really is coming into its own. It's no longer going to be – we now know that, with CNN, it's no longer going to be “CNN en Espanol.” It is changing its face. And, along with other different channels in television—in Spanish television– they're seeing that they are becoming more independent. They're taking on their new identity. They're meeting the culture and the language of audiences not only in the United States, throughout Latin America, and as well as in Spain. And each of these channels does carry a certain significance for Israel and for the Jewish people, and I'd like to speak about that briefly.

Now in Israel, where I'm actually based, we actually see a shortage of Spanish-language media professionals. And that's not necessarily because of a lack of interest; neither perhaps of a lack of a resource. But if we look at how many foreign journalists are based in Israel on a day-to-day basis, that work out of Israel, the percentage of Spanish-language journalists based here in Israel vis-à-vis the total percentage of Spanish-language – the Spanish-language population from Spain, and the United States, as well as Latin America, those numbers don't coincide whatsoever.

It is a very small percentage, which means a couple of things. One is in terms of Israel's image, is that there's not a lot of attention being paid to Israel in the Spanish-language media. When it is, the majority of those stories are coming from mainly newspapers and television stations that originate from Spain. And, through Spain, then comes across the Israel of – the image of Israel and the communication with Israel into Latin America, and eventually they publish in U.S. Hispanic publications and television stations.

So original content, vis-à-vis Israel, in Spanish to the Spanish-speaking world isn't really occurring on a day-to-day basis. And so part of why The Israel Project decided this was such a crucial time, not in terms of the increase of Spanish-language media but also the lack of Spanish-language communication in terms of Israel, from Israel per se, this was really the crucial time to be building such a program.

But not to speak so much about The Israel Project program, what I do want to speak about is there is also a difference – not a disproportionate, but there seems to be a lack of Spanish-speaking experts, in speaking with the media here and in speaking with the media abroad, there's a need to be telling the story of not only the Latinos in Israel, but the Jewish Latinos in the United States, as well as the Jews in Latin America – their communities, their successes, their struggles – in an effort to try to communicate more and project a positive, more positive picture; to decrease maybe misperceptions or any kind of inaccuracies, or even a lack of information; to raise awareness and familiarity. These are issues, these are experts, these are messages that need to be communicated on a more frequent basis.

Now, if we look at – not only that the lack of – there’s a lack of journalists, you could say, here that speak Spanish or that are communicating in Spanish with a number of Spanish-language media. The other issue is that those that are – not, I don’t want to say enemies, but they’re enemies of Israel and the enemies of the Jewish people, those different media outlets that have a specific agenda to misrepresent Israel, truths about Israel, and depict Israel in a more negative light, those types of media are also increasing as well. We see it in a number of languages, but it’s been now for some time also increasing in Spanish language as political, economic and military influence increases throughout Latin America, in terms of Iran, and Venezuela, and Bolivia, and others as well. We see this – in addition, that those types of – type of influence increasing, also there’s a need to communicate.

So we have, for example, just last – just a couple of weeks ago, Iran announced that it would be launching a 24-hour television Spanish news station, and that way – in terms of communicating its messages, it’s communicating issues that may support its political, economic and military interests, while at the same time suggesting a more positive image of itself, in terms of PR. Hezbollah, for example, an Iran-backed terrorist organization that has wielded significant influence over the years in Latin America in terms of terrorist attacks, is also involved in the tri-border region, also has recently been known to have shown up in Mexico as well, a lot closer to the U.S.-Mexico border.

Hezbollah has also – has a website on – Al-Manar – television, which is its main television broadcast station, also has it in Spanish. For some time, Iran has been communicating in Spanish to Latin America, but its efforts now, with the PressTV television station in Spanish now, really demonstrates how serious and how dedicated Iran is to making more significant inroads in the region, a lot closer to the U.S. border.

Last, but not least, speaking of the different kind of counter-communication and information that is going on. One also, that I forgot to mention, was Telesur, which is a television-- a pan-Latin American television station that was to curb American influence over media content in the region. So there is a lot of national communication, the communication of those that may not have diplomatic relations with Israel, that may not have a positive perception of Jews, but they are communicating their information and their perception of news within the region. And so, again, the need to communicate through the Spanish-language mainstream media is very important.

Lastly, I’d just like to speak about, and touch briefly on the issues of how all of these issues, in terms of the rise of the – the importance of Spanish-language media, the need for greater attention in the Spanish-language media for Israel and the Jewish people, in addition to what some of the common communication efforts are, is that there still is an issue with regard to sentiments of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism in the Latin American and Spanish-speaking world. Whereas, in Spain we have, just a couple of months ago in El Mundo– one of the main newspapers there, it was published that one-third of Spaniards are anti-Semitic because of Israeli policy. While attacks may not be so direct, there is, in a sense, and polls have demonstrated that there is tendency for anti-Semitic comment in terms of media coverage.

If we look at Latin America, I guess we have to treat differently each country there as well, we do see, since the rise – since Israel’s defensive war in Gaza in 2008, Jewish communities have suffered an increase in– some violent attacks in certain countries, but also in terms of just defacing of property, such as Jewish cemeteries, as well as synagogues. There are in some countries, such as Chile, for example, where the Jewish community is a lot more, also in Venezuela.

And so we know that some of this stems out of some of the larger media issues, such as the 2008 defensive war. Also we can look more recently to the issue of the flotilla. When these issues do arise in the media, when Israel’s foreign policy and policy of security is really brought up to the forefront in the media, what might not always be an Israel issue for each and every one of these countries, including the United States, suddenly becomes a major foreign policy issue. Suddenly you have different Hispanic leaders that are speaking out about Israel when, on a usual basis, they wouldn’t be.

When these sort of media events come to light, there is no context, there is no background, because of – and not necessarily a constant communication flow coming from Israel, in terms of what is the policy, and it’s not really preparing or educating the public and the leadership for when that issue comes, when that flotilla happens. Why did it happen; and what was the need for it?

So if we look at the combination of all of these, when it happens there is an increasing attack, a lot of graffiti that litters some of the Jewish sites tends to equate Israel’s policies with Nazism. Just to quote Sergio Widder of the Simon Weisenthal Center for Latin America in Buenos Aires. Last year he was quoted as saying there’s a new current of anti-Semitism in Latin America connected to the discourse of anti-Zionism. So we can see that there is a connection between, also in Latin America as well, to the issue of anti-Semitism and anti-Israel policies and perceptions.

And when it comes to the United States, there has not been polls recently in terms of what is the degree of anti-Semitism among the Hispanic communities there. But what we do know is that back in 2007 an ADL poll did demonstrate that there were sentiments of anti-Semitism amongst Hispanics living in the United States. But more importantly, what we have today, and we have to look towards for the future, is that we have large populations of Jews living side-by-side with Hispanics. And more and more, as the Hispanic population gains, and is able to integrate itself into society, it needs to be aware of issues such as the U.S.-Israel strong relationship, and the threat of Iran, all issues of which play an important part in America’s foreign policy.

So in terms of the U.S. Hispanic population, a recent poll done by – (inaudible) – showed that over 90 percent of Spanish-language – those of the U.S. Hispanics that speak predominantly Spanish are getting their news from Spanish-language television. But there’s also a percentage of English-speaking Hispanics in the United States that are also getting their information from radio news and television, because there seems to be a sense that an English – still a sense that in English-language television and media that Hispanics are portrayed unfairly. And so those

Americans – those Hispanic Americans are turning, instead of to English-language media, is going to Spanish-language media.

And, going back to my opening, again, it just shows that in order to communicate the message that we want to communicate from Israel and of the Jewish community, we're going to be needing to do it a lot more frequently in Spanish.

MS. MIZRAHI: Thank you all for being on the call. I'd like to thank Leah Soibel for leading this conversation. Please, if you have any more questions, don't hesitate to e-mail Leah. That's LeahS@TheIsraelProject.org. Thank you for your interest.

And Leah, thank you for this fascinating conversation. Have a good day.

(END.)