



Jimmy Carter's Apology Too Little Too Late

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Former US President Jimmy Carter's recent letter to the Jewish community expressing remorse for stigmatizing Israel has been met with mixed reactions by Jewish groups, with some calling the apology little more than a publicity stunt.

Carter's open letter, originally sent to the JTA, has provoked several calls to adopt a cautious wait and see approach. Others are not so hopeful.

Avi Benlolo called the apology "too little, too late" and "insufficient."

Benlolo, President and CEO of Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies, said that Carter's apology is "disingenuous at this point."

He said that one letter cannot possibly make up for Carter's rhetoric over the years, which has "armed many Jewish haters and Israel haters."

Benlolo added that a single letter will also not change the fact that Carter's past statements have been used on university campuses by students promoting Israel apartheid week, boycotts and sanctions.

"He's created a tremendous amount of damage to Israel and the Jewish people, even fomenting anti-Semitism," said Benlolo.

Carter, the author of *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, a controversial 2006 book that received widespread condemnation in the Jewish community, brokered peace between Israel and Egypt in 1979. Since then, he has had a strained relationship with the Jewish community and Israel and has been criticized for one-sided anti-Israel pronouncements.

In the letter, he offers an Al Het (a Yom Kippur prayer of confession) and asks for the Jewish community's forgiveness. He ends with "May we work and pray for that better day" while wishing the community a "Hag Semach and Happy Chanukah."

Abraham Foxman, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League, is hopeful that the letter

could be the start of a gradual reconciliation, but said that only time will tell.

Benlolo does not see it that way. He said that if Carter is really genuine in his wish for forgiveness, he needs to publish a new book called *Slichah* (“Sorry”) that he promotes as much as *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*.

“It’s not good enough to send an apology to the Jewish community because frankly the rest of the world doesn’t know about it,” said Benlolo. “Unless, every single day for the next month, he’s widely exposed and he’s really regretful, to me it doesn’t mean a lot.”

In a posting on his Jerusalem Post blog entitled “Why is Carter suddenly concerned about forgiveness?” former NYC Mayor Ed Koch said that if Carter truly wants forgiveness from the Jewish community, the onus is on him to list the wrongs he feels require forgiveness.

He also pointed out that there is not a designated person in the Jewish community who has the power to grant Carter forgiveness on behalf of all Jews.

“My advice to Jimmy Carter is to come clean. I believe that we Jews are a forgiving people, but we are also a people who, having been brutalized through the centuries, are suspicious of those who at the end of their lives wish to make amends but have not demonstrated any repentance. What does Carter intend to do with the balance of his life to remedy the harm and injury to the Jewish people that he has inflicted over the years?” wrote Koch.

Since the letter’s release, the Internet has been rife with rumours that the apology is part of an orchestrated attempt by Carter to smooth over relations for political purposes. Carter’s grandson, Jason Cater, is running for the Georgia state senate seat vacated by David Adelman, who is Jewish.

Benlolo said that such conjecture is irrelevant. The bigger picture is that one letter cannot make up for the damage Carter’s words and actions have caused over the years.

The apology – if it’s “real and genuine” – must be followed by more.

“Go on *Oprah*, go on talk shows, speak about it, publish articles. Go on campuses and say 'Look, I made a big mistake, I’m sorry.' Do all of those things to make it right,” said Benlolo.

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About Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies

Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies is a Canadian human rights organization dedicated to fostering tolerance and understanding through community involvement, educational outreach and social action. The Center currently has over 25,000 members across Canada, and confronts important contemporary issues including racism, antisemitism, terrorism and genocide. Visit www.fswc.ca for more information.

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