

Opinion: The Truth About Israel?

Let me begin by saying that when most people think of Israel, they think of war, terror and conflict. They think of all these things because that is what the media portrays Israel as: a place of conflict. But how many of those people have actually visited Israel?

For the past few weeks, I've had the pleasure of being in Israel and visiting my father. I've had the pleasure of speaking to some of my friends who are currently serving in the Israel Defense Forces, and I've had the pleasure of really experiencing Israel. When I say Israel, I mean the real Israel, not the Israel that the media portrays.

This experience inspired me to commit even more to Israel activism, because it is imperative and necessary, especially in the world today.

The great Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "I see Israel as one of the great outposts of democracy in the world and a marvelous example of what can be done, how desert land can be transformed into an oasis of brotherhood and democracy."

That is exactly what Israel is—an "oasis of brotherhood and democracy," the only true democracy in the Middle East.

Israel is a country that from the very day it was re-established in 1948 adopted a policy of equality for all. Did you know that in 1969, Israel elected a female prime minister, or head of state, named Golda Meir? This is a feat that some democratic countries, such as the United States, have yet to accomplish.

If you enter Israel today, if you come and visit, you will see that Muslims, blacks, Jews, Christians and whites that live in

Israel are all treated as equal citizens. If you go to Tel Aviv, Haifa, Jerusalem, Hadera, Eilat—any place in Israel—you will see people of all faiths and backgrounds walking together, shopping together, swimming together and even hanging out together.

Take time to actually look into Israel and research it. Look at how accepting Israel is and how they treat all their citizens equally. There are currently Arab members of Israel's Knesset, which is their Parliament or Congress, and there were Arab members on the very first Knesset back in 1948. There have been Arab chief justices on Israel's Supreme Court, and there have been Arab winners of the Miss Israel beauty pageant. There are even Arab soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces—Arabs that serve their country proudly!

When it comes to Israel, there is a lot that is said, but how much of what you hear is actually the truth? How much of what the media says and claims is the truth? It is often said that as long as there is more profit in war than in peace, we will never experience peace. Lies will be spread and hate will be encouraged. People will try to turn us against one another.

That is why you should all research more, look into the truth about Israel, and come visit Israel for yourself. Come talk to the countless number of Muslims, Jews and Christians who consider Israel their home and would never leave. Come see just how great Israel truly is, and come hear the testimonies of all those who love this country and would die for it.

The truth is that Israel isn't perfect, but what country is? The beauty of a democracy is that there is always room for improvement, and it undoubtedly does improve with time.

The bottom line, however, is that Israel, to millions of Jews, Muslims and Christians alike, is a home, a safe haven, a "rose among thorns" in a very scary region. That is why we must do all we can to protect Israel and spread the truth about what

goes on there. We must not do it for ourselves, but for the millions of people who call Israel their home—the same people who would be persecuted in almost any other country in the Middle East.

Israel is here to stay.