

Cotler Fellows Make a Difference

TAU international students fight antisemitism globally



Cotler Fellowship Alumna Maia Bornsztejn and colleagues at a pro-Israel demonstration in Argentina

In the wake of October 7th and the ensuing war, Jewish communities around the world are experiencing a troubling surge in antisemitism, while Israelis find it increasingly difficult to advocate for the country on the international stage. One timely Tel Aviv University initiative, [the Irwin Cotler Fellowship Program](#), is actively helping by providing key academic and practical knowledge to international students to counter anti-Jewish and anti-Israel sentiment in their home countries.

Since its inception, about 60 alumni of the program are now Israel's goodwill ambassadors around the world, including students from Indonesia, Azerbaijan, Morocco, Turkey, Portugal, Nigeria, New Zealand, India, Belgium and more.

Each year, the program brings together 20 international students for weekly lectures and projects. They explore universal issues related to human rights and democracy; discuss Israeli society, history, diversity, and challenges; and attend field trips to communities and historical sites across the country. The Cotler Fellows is the flagship program of TAU's [Irwin Cotler Institute](#), founded in 2022 to advance instruction, training, and policy-oriented research on human rights, democracy, justice, and the fight against antisemitism and racism at large.

Says Prof. Uriya Shavit, Head of the Cotler Institute: “Fellows are exposed to a variety of viewpoints and encouraged to explore the issues independently and critically. We then equip them with public speaking and grassroots organizational skills so that they can deliver workshops in their language to influential groups at home – such as the police, municipal leaders, sports coaches, and the like.”

Educating via Workshops

Indeed, Irwin Cotler Fellows are required to initiate, organize, and lead an international workshop, utilizing the knowledge and skills they gained in the program. Although the 2023-2024 academic year has been particularly complicated, that did not stop Cotler fellows from carrying out their missions. Ari Spielman, a 2024 Cotler Fellow from the United States who studied Environmental Studies at TAU, prepared a lecture about social movements in Israel following October 7th.

“I gave my presentation at my alma mater, SUNY Albany, in New York. I was worried about giving the talk initially. The University Student Union had just passed a BDS bill, the first in the SUNY system. Yet in the end, we still had a good turnout, with no issues. I felt very confident with how I was able to present the information and convey what has been occurring in Israel in an understandable way to the audience,” Spielman explains.

“My time as a Cotler fellow helped me improve my public speaking, and ability to efficiently share information. I am very grateful for having been given the opportunity to do the presentation,” he adds.

Some of the other Cotler Fellows' workshops were conducted online and are posted on the Institute's website and on YouTube. Here are a few examples:

- Master student in Security & Diplomacy Julie Jakobsgaard (Denmark) – **Antisemitism: Its Development and Present State in Denmark**
- Dental medicine student Joshua G. Cardenas (United States) – **Balancing Tech Innovation & Ethics During Times of Crisis**

- Post-doc Dr. Mrinal Kashyap (India) – **Israel-India Relations and Antisemitism Awareness**
- Law student Veronica Pana Igube (Nigeria) – **Strategies for Combating Online Hate**

Other workshops given by Fellows this year included: Anna Balogh (Hungary) on environmental peacebuilding and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; Gülsen Aşam (Turkey) on the Syrian refugee crisis and the response of the Turkish government; Akman Sofuoğlu (Turkey) on Israel and misconceptions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and Dacha Azelmad (Morocco) on preserving Jewish memory in Morocco.

“It has been an incredibly enriching experience for me. The insightful discussions and collaborative projects have broadened my understanding of key issues and made me closer to the Jewish culture and to Israel,” says Dacha Azelmad from Morocco, a 2024 Cotler Fellow who studied for an MA in Security and Diplomacy.

“I feel more equipped and inspired to contribute meaningfully to these important conversations in the future, and I am very grateful for this opportunity. Hopefully, my engagement does not stop here!” she adds.

Alumni in Action

Beyond the mandatory workshops, in the wake of the October 7 attack, graduates of the Cotler Fellowship program chose to not remain silent and used their new skills and knowledge to engage in pro-Israel action around the world.

In May 2024, 2023 Cotler Fellow Nathaniel Myking Udjus organized a support rally for Israel and against antisemitism in his hometown of Grimstad, Norway, together with several local political parties and political organizations. The rally drew over 500 participants from Southern Norway, who expressed their support for Israel and disagreement with the Norwegian government’s policies.



Nathaniel Myking Udjus speaking at an Israel support rally he organized in his hometown of Grimstad, Norway

Nathaniel's classmate Maia Bornsztein participated in numerous pro-Israel demonstrations that have been held in Argentina. Working with her colleagues, Maia has organized and participated in conferences on Israel and the war at local schools, universities, and more than twenty Jewish community institutions, as well as making online informative videos. Furthermore, as a member of the Latin American Jewish Congress, she has been very active in its social media campaigns, generating positive content about Jewish communities around the world and attending meetings with public officials to find common areas to build solidarity against antisemitism.

Other 2023 alumni similarly reached out. Rafael Nabizade moderated a webinar addressing how Israel and Azerbaijan are confronting Iranian-backed religious terrorism. Aryo Brahmantyo lobbied Indonesian media to cover the situation in a more balanced manner, providing video footage to raise awareness about the atrocities committed by Hamas.



Cotler Fellow Aryo Brahmantyo appearing on Indonesian television

Markus McCraith, Cotler Fellow in the 2024 cohort, initiated and helped organize a Cotler Institute ten-day series of seminars and public lectures in his home country of New Zealand. Senior members of the Jewish communities hailed the lectures and seminars as exceptionally empowering and informative and noted that the tour raised awareness among government agencies about the reality of antisemitism and helped establish new channels for communication and cooperation with the government.

“The Irwin Cotler Fellowship Program has truly been a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me,” McCraith says.

Justice, Justice Shall You Pursue

The Irwin Cotler Institute celebrates and advances the legacy of one of the greatest and most respected Canadian jurists and human rights champions in our time, Prof. Irwin Cotler, who is one of the lecturers at the Fellowship Program and also a TAU Governor and Honorary Doctor. “I hope that through our students we’ll create a critical mass of advocacy on behalf of the Jewish people and that Tel Aviv University will be at the forefront of that involvement,” he said at the Institute's opening.



Hon. Irwin Cotler with wife Daniella at the TAU Canada Gala (photo: TAU Canada)

Prof. Cotler's life and legacy were recently celebrated by our Tel Aviv University supporters in Montreal, Canada with 550 guests, family, and friends. "We paid tribute to an extraordinary person, who has dedicated his life and career to making the world a better place," said the head of TAU Canada Montreal chapter Sharon J. Fraenkel, quoting former Canadian Supreme Court Justice Rosie Abella, who said, "We are all better people today because of Irwin".



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