

PREFACE

This volume reproduces the transcript of the debate held on 13-14 January 2005 at the Fondazione Adriano Olivetti, on a topic that is particularly important to all of us: the future of the State of Israel.

This project was born out of a meeting in New York between myself and Edna and Avishai Margalit, both professors of philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and both active and exemplary citizens of a state born out of the tragic circumstances of World War II, on the heels of the persecution of the Jewish people and their expulsion from Europe. The tragedy of the Palestinians, which is set against that of the Jews, has created an endemic conflict in the lands of Palestine, which the second *intifada* has violently brought to the attention of international public opinion. Recent events, from the death of Yasir Arafat to the difficult decision of Ariel Sharon's government to order the withdrawal of Jewish colonies from the Gaza Strip, have let in faint glimmers of hope for peace and reconciliation among those peoples whom fate and history oblige to share the same narrow tongue of land squeezed between the desert and the sea – a land laden with memories, passions, devotions and torments.

This debate, which was made possible by the kind and generous collaboration with the Italian Jewish Community and the friendship of its president Amos Luzzatto, took a unique form. It seemed to us that it would be inopportune to put ourselves in the position of observers and judges of the present conflict between Jews and Palestinians, Europeans' heavy responsibility for the "expulsion" of the Jews permanently disqualifies us from being impartial judges. It seemed instead opportune to provide Israeli and Italian Jews a space for a dialogue "between themselves." The extraordinary pluralism of the Jewish and Israeli civil and political culture – to which this volume is a vivid testimony – by itself guaranteed respect for the principle of every civil debate: *audiamus et altera pars*.

The reader will judge the wealth and vivacity of the encounter for his- or herself. With this publication, the president of the foundation, Laura Olivetti, and I would like to express our friendship with the Jews and honor the memory of the persecutions which, under Fascism, victimized the Olivetti family, and Adriano in particular.