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Did the Jewish Agency sponsor a New Israel Fund event in New York?

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NEW YORK – An event to be held this week at the Jewish Community Center in Manhattan, “Love, Hate and the Jewish State 4.0: Airing the Dirty Laundry,” is being sponsored by various organizations. The question of whether the Jewish Agency is among them is one that is apparently up for debate.

“Love, Hate and the Jewish State” is a highly successful program that engages young people in a serious discussion of the complexities of Israeli society,” Rabbi David Rosenn, chief operating officer at the New Israel Fund, told *The Jerusalem Post* about the event, scheduled for Wednesday. “Everyone knows and the most recent research emphasizes that young people (and not just young people) want an opportunity to think critically about Israel in a supportive atmosphere and that

they respond negatively to indoctrination and party lines.”

JCC Watch, however, has protested the event. Original listings, including the link to buy tickets, stated that the event was being jointly sponsored by the New Israel Fund and Makom (the Jewish Agency for Israel). Subsequent listings, however, removed Makom’s name, after JCC Watch posted that according to the North American director of Makom, Rami Wernik, the organization was not sponsoring the event. JCC Watch’s founder, Richard Allen, contended that “the Jewish Agency was hoodwinked” into lending its name to an event with a “bash-Israel agenda.”

“This is another instance of a radical group using the cloak of mainstream Jewish organizations to stage an anti-Israel event,” Allen wrote in a press release. “Once again, the JCC in Manhattan has been caught hosting, linking and partnering

with groups that call for or fund efforts to boycott, divest and invoke sanctions against the Jewish State of Israel.”

“Unfortunately, indoctrination, party lines and hysterical name calling is precisely what the self-appointed JCC Watch is offering,” Rosenn said. “Neither the Jewish Agency nor the Manhattan JCC is likely to be hoodwinked into a partnership on a program about Israel, an area where both institutions have deep expertise. They just understand that good conversations about Israel are what’s needed, which is precisely why the New Israel Fund developed this program in the first place.”

“Being critical of the status quo is an inherent part of social change – we identify problems in our world that we hope to solve or improve,” the New Israel Fund’s website states in a description of the event. “But free expression of critical views of the Jewish state inside and outside of

Jewish communities often meets with complicated rules against ‘airing our dirty laundry.’”

The NIF website cites recent events such as the imbroglia surrounding the CUNY honorary degree award to playwright Tony Kushner as shedding light “on the tense atmosphere around the discourse on Israel in the American Jewish community.”

The event is designed to be a “highly interactive, non-persuasive, open” discussion with people in their 20s and 30s. As of midmorning Wednesday, however, the event was not listed on the Manhattan JCC’s website.

“JCCWatch.org condemns the JCC in Manhattan for hosting the anti-Israel “Love, Hate and the Jewish State 4.0” on its facilities, and once again calls on the organization’s board of directors to establish firm and serious guidelines to prevent the JCC in Manhattan from becoming a hotbed of anti-Israel activities,” Allen’s press release said.