

A Leadership Call for Critical and Necessary Debate About Israeli Policies

“It Is Profoundly Irresponsible to Conflate Charges of Antisemitism With Criticism of Israeli Policies”

Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Israel has had no greater ally than the United States, and the two countries have formed enduring unbreakable ties based on deeply held shared values.

At this pivotal moment in Israel's history – and with the beginning of a new Congress – we take this opportunity, as leaders in the American Jewish community, to affirm the importance of maintaining those bonds and upholding the strength of the U.S.-Israel relationship.

As the 118th Congress begins its work, we believe it is important to state our concerns – which are widely shared by supporters of Israel here and around the world and by a significant number of Israelis – regarding some of the policies proposed by members of Israel's new government.

Our criticisms emanate from a love for Israel and a steadfast support for its security and well-being. Some will try to dismiss their validity by labeling them antisemitic. We want to be clear that, whether or not one agrees with a particular criticism, such [critiques of Israeli policy are not antisemitic](#). Indeed, they reflect a real concern that the new government's direction mirrors anti-democratic trends that we see arising elsewhere—in other nations and here in the U.S., rather than reinforcing the shared democratic values that are foundational to the U.S.-Israel relationship.

We are, for example, concerned about the Israeli Justice Minister's plan to [limit the Supreme Court's power](#), proposed modifications to the Law of Return to [change the status quo](#) on conversions to Judaism, and calls by ultra-Orthodox coalition members to [outlaw non-Orthodox prayer at the Western Wall](#). We are also concerned about provocative actions that seek to [open the Temple Mount to Jewish prayer](#) in defiance of long-standing international norms and coalition agreements, [legitimize settlement outposts retroactively](#), and expand Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank.

Let us be clear: when [antisemitism](#) shows up in debates about the situation in Israel and the occupied territories, it must be called out. It is antisemitic to advocate the destruction of Israel or to deny the right of the Jewish people to self-determination. It is antisemitic to condemn Israel by using antisemitic tropes or singling out Israel because of its Jewish character. It is antisemitic to use Israel or Zionism as a surrogate for Jews, to hold Jews collectively responsible for Israel's policies or conduct, or to suggest that American Jews are more loyal to Israel than to the U.S.

Accusations of antisemitism, however, must not be abused or misused. Indeed, it is profoundly irresponsible to conflate charges of antisemitism with criticism of Israeli policies, especially when antisemitism is on the rise in our country and elsewhere around the world.

Promoting equal rights and justice for all peoples, including Palestinians within Israel and in the occupied territories, is neither anti-Israel nor antisemitic. Indeed, the two-state solution, which is critical for Israel's survival, provides both Israelis and Palestinians with national rights, individual human rights, safety, and security. It is not antisemitic to hold Israel to the standards that guide the U.S. commitment to human rights across the globe and reflect our commitment to democracy. And while we do not support the BDS movement, we recognize that non-violent actions that press for changes in Israeli policies are not ipso facto antisemitic.

Turning political disputes about the policies of the Israeli government into an argument about antisemitism interferes with the critical and necessary debate about these policies. It also makes it harder to fight antisemitism by diverting attention away from genuine occurrences of anti-Jewish bigotry and hate.

The bottom line is this: There is no contradiction between combating antisemitism and criticizing the deeply troubling policies of the new Israeli government. Those who employ accusations of antisemitism as a political weapon poison the debate, and they weaken our ability to fight real antisemitism and effectively advocate for a strong U.S.-Israel relationship.

Signatories

Rabbi David Adelson, New York, NY
Karen Adler, New York, NY
Rabbi Esther Adler, Saint Paul, MN
Rabbi Thomas M. Alpert, Franklin, MA
David Arnow, Scarsdale, NY
Cantor Barbara Barnett, Pittsburgh, PA
Omer Bartov, Providence, RI
Jeremy Ben-Ami, Washington, DC
Talia Benamy, New York, NY
Michael Berenbaum, Los Angeles, CA
Rabbi Marjorie Berman, Philadelphia, PA
Nancy Bernstein, Pittsburgh, PA
David Biale, Davis, CA
Rabbi Rena Blumenthal, New Paltz, NY
Ken Bob, Plainview, NY
Rabbi Bradd Boxman, Parkland, FL
Daniel Bral, Los Angeles, CA
Martin Bresler, New York, NY
David Broida, Bryn Mawr, PA
Shifra Bronznick, New York, NY
Rabbi Sharon Brous, Los Angeles, CA
Rabbi Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, Providence, RI
Rabbi Reba Carmel, Cheltenham, PA
Rabbi David Chapman, Chicago, IL
Rabbi Ken Chasen, Los Angeles, CA
Rabbi Howard A Cohen, Bennington, VT
David Cohen, Delray Beach, FL
Rabbi Michael Cohen, Manchester Center, VT
Rabbi Ayelet Cohen, New York, NY
Rabbi Tamara Cohen, Philadelphia, PA
Rabbi Fredi Cooper, Wyndmoor, PA
Miriam Daniel, Washington, DC
Tom Dine, Washington, DC
Rabbi Fred Scherlinder Dobb, Bethesda, MD
Barbara Dobkin, New York, NY
Eric Dobkin, New York, NY
Rabbi Doris J. Dyen, Pittsburgh, PA

Paul Egerman, Boston, MA
Rabbi Amy Eilberg, Los Altos, CA
Rabbi Jeffrey Eisenstat, Gladwyne, PA
Rabbi David Ellenson, New York, NY
Rabbi Rachel Esserman, Binghamton, NY
Rabbi Jeffrey L. Falick, Detroit, MI
Diane S. Feinberg, Washington, DC
Senator Russell Feingold, Middleton, WI
Merle Feld, Northampton, MA
Rabbi Edward Feld, Northampton, MA
Rabbi Tirzah Firestone, Boulder, CO
Cary Fleischer, Grand Rapids, MI
Rabbi Betsy Forester, Madison, WI
Rabbi Wayne Franklin, Providence, RI
Peter Frey, New York, NY
David Friedman, Boulder, CO
Rabbi Elyse Frishman, Franklin Lakes, NJ
Rabbi Laura Geller, Beverly Hills, CA
Rabbi Chana Leslie Glazer, Springfield, VA
Rabbi Bob (Robert) Gluck, Albany, NY
Dick Goldberg, Philadelphia, PA
Barbara Goldberg Goldman, Washington, DC
Dana Gordon, Highland Park, IL
Rabbi Samuel Gordon, Wilmette, IL
Sally Gottesman, New York, NY
Rabbi Andrea M. Gouze, Providence, RI
Rabbi Arthur Green, Newton, MA
Ginna Green, Columbia, SC
Eric Greene, Los Angeles, CA
Jon Greenwald, McLean, VA
Michael Greenwald, Philadelphia, PA
Lisa Greer, Beverly Hills, CA
Steven Grossman, Boston, MA
Rabbi Steve Gutow, New York, NY
Rabbi Maurice Harris, Wyncote, PA
Rabbi Patti Haskell, Asheville, NC
Rabbi Lizzi Heydemann, Chicago, IL

NEXUS

Ada Horwich, Los Angeles, CA
Rabbi Jocee Hudson, Los Angeles, CA
Rabbi Daniel Isaak, Portland, OR
Rabbi Jill Jacobs, New York, NY
Jonathan Jacoby, Los Angeles, CA
Rabbi Ellen Jaffe-Gill, Virginia Beach, VA
Rabbi Beth Janus, Philadelphia, PA
Rabbi Amita Jarmon, Brattleboro, VT
Peter Joseph, New York, NY
Thomas Kahn, Washington, DC
Rabbi Debra Newman Kamin, Northfield, IL
Joe Kanfer, Cleveland, OH
Ambassador (ret.) Samuel Kaplan, Minneapolis, MN
Sylvia Kaplan, Minneapolis, MN
Nancy Kaufman, New York, NY
Idit Klein, Boston, MA
Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, New York, NY
Rabbi Stephanie Kolin, Brooklyn, NY
Steven Koppel, New York, NY
Jim Koshland, Palo Alto, CA
Victor A. Kovner, New York, NY
Rabbi Claudia Kreiman, Brookline, MA
Rabbi Nancy Fuchs Kreimer, Philadelphia, PA
Luis Lainer, Los Angeles, CA
Sheila Lambert, New York, NY
Yehezkel Landau, Bethel, CT
Rabbi Karen Landy, Somerville, MA
Rabbi Amichai Lau-Lavie, New York, NY
Steven Lax, New York, NY
Susan Lax, New York, NY
Rabbi Esther Lederman, Washington, DC
Kathleen Levin, New York, NY
Congressman Mel Levine, Los Angeles, CA
Rabbi Joy Levitt, New York, NY
Rabbi Naomi Levy, Los Angeles, CA
Rabbi Andrea London, Evanston, IL
Jonathan Lopatin, New York, NY
Rabbi Sara Luria, New York, NY
Brian Lurie, San Francisco, CA
Rabbi Shana Margolin, Montpelier, VT
Rabbi Richard Marker, Bethesda, MD
Steve Masters, Philadelphia, PA
Rabbi Rolando Matalon, New York, NY
Yavilah McCoy, Boston, MA
Ruth Messinger, New York, NY
Rabbi Jack Moline, Arlington, VA
Rabbi Sarah Newmark, Gig Harbor, WA
Sam (Samuel) Norich, New York, NY
Matt Nosanchuk, New York, NY
Rabbi Michael Paley, New York, NY
Judith Stern Peck, New York, NY
Debra Pell, San Francisco, CA
Cantor Hasha Musha Perman, Naperville, IL
Letty Cottin Pogrebin, New York, NY
Joy E. Pollock, Jenkintown, PA
Steve Rabinowitz, Washington, DC
Paula Rackoff, New York, NY
Rabbi Debra Rappaport, Ann Arbor, MI
Gail Reimer, Brookline MA
Joseph Reimer, Brookline MA
Marcia Ricklis, New York, NY
Rabbi Mira Rivera, New York, NY
Judith Rosenbaum, Newton, MA
Norman Rosenberg, Washington, DC
Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom, Elkins Park, PA
Hannah Rosenthal, Milwaukee, WI
Rabbi John Rosove, Los Angeles, CA
Roni Rubenstein, New York, NY
Joel Rubin, Chevy Chase, MD
John Ruskay, New York, NY
Ambassador (ret.) Rabbi David Saperstein, Washington, DC
Rabbi Marna Sapsowitz, Olympia, WA
Nigel Savage, New York, NY
Paul Scham, College Park, MD
Suzanne Schecter, New York, NY
Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer, Bethesda, MD
Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, New York, NY
David Schraub, Portland, OR

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Rabbi Jeremy Schwartz, Willimantic, CT
Rabbi Sid Schwarz, New York, NY
Paige Seeherman, New Hope, PA
Rabbi Steve Segar , Cleveland, OH
Rabbi Chaim Seidler-Feller, Los Angeles, CA
Rabbi Rami Shapiro, Murfreesboro TN
Steven Sheffey, Highland Park, IL
Burt Siegel, Jenkintown, PA
Burton Siegel
William S. Singer, Chicago, IL
Marc Slutsky, Chicago, IL
Rabbi Amy Joy Small , Burlington, VT
Phyllis Snyder, Merion, PA
Daniel Sokatch, San Francisco, CA
Rabbi Felicia Sol, New York, NY
Ambassador (ret.) Alan Solomont, Boston, MA
Alan Solow, Chicago, IL
Rabbi Toba Spitzer, West Newton, MA
Alexandra Stanton, New York, NY
Sandy Starkman, Highland Park, IL
Rabbi Jacob Staub, Wyncote, PA
Debra Stein, Scottsdale, AZ
Rabbi David Steinberg, Duluth, MN
Rabbi Sharon Stiefel, St. Paul, MN
Rabbi Michael Strassfeld, New York, NY

Rabbi Shira Stutman, Washington, DC
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Hadar Susskind, Washington, DC
Rabbi Robert Tabak, Philadelphia, PA
Rabbi Susan Talve, St. Louis, MO
Joel Tauber, Miami, FL
Rabbi David A. Teutsch, Wyncote, PA
Rabbi Rachel Timoner, Brooklyn, NY
Rabbi Shoshanah Tornberg, Abington, PA
Rabbi Burton Visotzky, New York, NY
Rabbi Andrew Vogel, Brookline MA
Cantor Eliot I. Vogel, Penn Valley, PA
Rabbi Joshua Waxman, Wyckoff NJ
Rabbi Elyse Wechterman, Wyncote, PA
Deborah Weinstein, Philadelphia, PA
Rabbi Simkha Y Weintraub, New York, NY
Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig, New York, NY
Carol Winograd, Stanford, CA
Terry Winograd, Stanford, CA
Diane Winston, Los Angeles, CA
Rabbi Michal Woll, Milwaukee, WI
Laurence Wolff, Washington, DC
Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Westfield, NJ
Rabbi Daniel G. Zemel, Washington, DC
Jill Zipin, Horsham, PA