

CONSERVATIVE AND REFORM MOVEMENTS ISSUE JOINT STATEMENT EXPRESSING OUTRAGE AND DISMAY AT KNESSET'S ACTIONS

Movements agree to joint plan of action for 1800 synagogues and 3 million members

The leadership of the Conservative and Reform movements issued a joint statement in April saying the Knesset is fracturing the unity of the Jewish people by its support

for a bill that denies recognition of non-Orthodox conversions performed in Israel. They also called upon their 1800 congregations in North America to refrain from welcoming any

member of the Knesset who supports the conversion bill on its final reading in the Knesset.

The twenty lay and movements' bodies also called for

their members to lobby their local federations to provide increased direct support to Conservative and Reform programs in Israel and to "take upon themselves the responsibility that the Israeli government has betrayed: the responsibility to encourage all serious forms of Jewish religious expression." ☆

The full text of the statement reads:

As leaders of Reform and Conservative Judaism, we are both dismayed and outraged by the decision of Israel's Knesset to try to deter the development of religious pluralism in Israel. At a time when the unity of the Jewish people should be the driving purpose of every responsible Jewish body, the Knesset has decided to fracture that unity by approving the first reading of a bill which denies recognition of non-Orthodox conversions performed in Israel.

We find the vote on the conversion bill difficult to understand and impossible to accept. The Knesset should have welcomed the recent decision of Israel's Supreme Court which created the possibility that the State might finally recognize conversions authenticated by each one of our people's religious streams; instead, the Knesset has chosen to revert to the offensive and exclusivist practice of earlier years. The

effort to continue an Orthodox monopoly on conversion and to seek to delegitimize Conservative and Reform Judaism is an insult to our movements and our members; we vigorously protest it.

Accordingly, we have agreed to take the following steps:

1. We urge our 1800 congregations in North America to refrain from welcoming as honored guests those members of Knesset who support the conversion bill in its final reading. We ask our synagogues to refrain from extending invitations to them to appear as speakers or lecturers, or as guests of honor in our institutions. Furthermore, we ask our congregational leaders to refrain from supporting any communal activity to which such Knesset members have been invited. We adopt this policy with great regret. However, we cannot in good conscience include among our honored guests those who

choose to exclude us from the religious community of our people. It is our intention to review this policy every six months.

2. We repudiate any compromise that will affirm the Orthodox stranglehold over conversions in Israel.

3. We call on all those who believe, with us, that there must be greater appreciation of and access to all religious streams in Israel, to contribute even more generously to Reform and Conservative programs and institutions in Israel. It is essential that our members and friends take on themselves the responsibility that the Israeli government has betrayed: the responsibility to encourage all serious forms of Jewish religious expression.

4. As we always have, we strongly encourage our members to contribute generously to their local Federation campaigns. We deeply believe that those

campaigns are essential commitments of our communal components. At the same time, we call on our members, and especially those who are active in their local federations, to encourage their federations to provide increased support to Conservative and Reform programs in Israel. And, we continue to press for a reassessment of funding allocation from the Jewish Agency to provide greater resources for our movements, programs and institutions in Israel.

While we work unceasingly for a change in Israeli policy and to build our movements in Israel, we are prepared to enter all discussions which will enable all religious streams to work together with respect and caring, to strengthen our people's faith and to insure prosperity and well-being for Zion and our people.

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Charlotte Affinity Groups Convene Summit Meeting

A special meeting of the leadership of each of the three affinity groups in Charlotte, hosted by Bill Gorelick, Campaign Chairman and addressed by Rich Osborne, Federation President, brought into sharp focus the important roles they would play as viable Jewish community assets. Discussions centered around community involvement; responsibilities to the Jewish Federation; commitment to the Jewish community; ongoing events for each division; and the interaction of all divisions by having an overall annual event. In addition, Dr. David Citron, Chairman of the Physicians and Dentists Division, announced plans for a Maimonides Society Mission to Europe and Israel in March, 1998.

Lou Wernick, Director of

Special Projects for the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte, was acknowledged at the leadership summit meeting for his efforts in organizing and recruiting the leadership for each of the three affinity groups in Charlotte and for maintaining the continuity of the programs.

Representing the Financial and Business Division were Richard Gross, Chairman and Ken Rivkin; the Lawyer's Division was represented by Hal Levinson, Chairman, and Steven Garfinkel; the Physicians and Dentists Division and Maimonides Society were represented by Dr. David Citron, Chairman and Dr. Gerson Asrael.

The purpose of the affinity groups are to:

- Provide a forum to facilitate networking among

professionals.

- Serve as a link to the Jewish community for those professionals who are not affiliated with other Jewish institutions.
- Encourage social interaction and professional/educational exchange.
- Provide a forum to inform and educate members on the activities of the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte.
- Support and strengthen Jewish life in Charlotte through active involvement with the Jewish Federation.

For information regarding any of the affinity groups, please call Lou Wernick at the Jewish Federation office, 366-5007. ☆

New Index of Leading Middle East Peace Indicators Graphically Demonstrates Extent to Which Peace Process has Deteriorated

A new index of leading Middle East peace indicators released in April demonstrates in unprecedented detail that the Arab-Israeli peace process is in its worst shape since the 'pre-Oslo' period of 1992. The index, called Peace Pulse, also provides conclusive empirical evidence of the extent to which the peace process — and a host of economic, diplomatic and other trends associated with it — has declined in the last two months.

Since January, there has been a negative index in each of the 14 separate indices used by the project to take the "pulse" of the peace process. "Peace Pulse" is a joint project of Israel Policy Forum and the UCLA Center for International Relations. Combining 14 qualitative and quantitative indicators, it rates the over-all peace process at given historical moments on a scale of 0-

100, where 0 is "total war" and 100 is "total peace."

The Peace Pulse "score" for the over-all peace process at the end of March, 1997 was 39.05. That is a 16% decline since the end of January, 1997, the month of the Hebron accord when the score was 55.7. The sharp drop is attributable not only to self-evident trends like deteriorating Israeli-Palestinian relations, but also to declines in the Israeli and Palestinian economies, public support for the peace process in the region, tourism to Israel and other indicators.

"The data show conclusively that the events of the past few months — from strife over plans to build in Har Homa to terrorist activity — have erased, at least temporarily, the progress that had been made since Rabin and Arafat shook hands on the White House

lawn," said Dr. Steven Spiegel, the Peace Pulse Project Director and a Professor of Political Science.

The Peace Pulse score for 1992 was 38.75, about what it is today. In contrast, when the peace process was at its height in October, 1995 just before the Rabin assassination, the score was 69.4.

Declining Peace Pulse scores since January, 1997, include those given to:

- The Israeli economy (measured by tourism, Israeli exports, Israeli companies on Wall Street and investments by nonresidents), which dipped from 5.25 to 4.75.
- The Palestinian economy (i.e., unemployment and GDP growth), which has dropped from 2 to 1.5.
- Confidence in Israel about the economy and the future (i.e. retail

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