

June 27, 2017

To: Partnership2Gether Chairs in Israel and Overseas
Partnership Family

From: Lori Klinghoffer, Dalia Yosef and Jack Smorgon
Chairs of the Board of Governors Partnership Committee
Chairs of the Partnership Global Council

Dear *Hevarim*,

We are writing to you as leaders in Partnership2Gether – Israeli and Diaspora chairs who endeavor every day to strengthen the Jewish people by creating living bridges between Israel and overseas Jewish communities. We know how much time, energy and resources our entire Partnership Family invests in making the Jewish world more united and inclusive. We are writing to you out of tremendous concern and anger over the developments of the past 48 hours.

On Sunday, June 25, the Israeli government adopted a decision submitted by Minister of the Interior Aryeh Deri (Shas) and Minister of Health Yaakov Litzman (United Torah Judaism) **to suspend implementation of its January 2016 decision** adopting a plan based on a proposal by Chairman of the Executive Natan Sharansky to significantly expand and upgrade the egalitarian prayer space in the southern part of the Western Wall and place it under the control of a committee composed of representatives of the Reform and Conservative movements and several other organizations and chaired by the Chairman of the Executive. Additionally, the Ministerial Committee on Legislation approved a bill that would **withdraw official recognition from conversions** not conducted under the auspices of the Chief Rabbinate.

We are gravely concerned that both of Sunday's government decisions are liable to cause significant, long-term damage to Israel-Diaspora relations and should thus be reversed. In short, working against everything that we in P2G strive to achieve on behalf of the Jewish people.

We are gravely concerned that there is a strong sense among many Diaspora Jews that their modes of religious practice are not recognized by the country's establishment is a source of growing anger and frustration, leading to alienation, particularly among the younger generation, and a reduction of the support of Israel. As a result of these steps, we are concerned that Israel will be weakened without the support and advocacy on its behalf from world Jewry.



We thought you would be interested in reading the response released by the Chairman of the Executive Natan Sharansky:

“As Chairman of The Jewish Agency for Israel, and on behalf of our partners, I must express my deep disappointment at today's decision by the Government of Israel to suspend the implementation of its own decision to establish a dignified space for egalitarian prayer at the Western Wall.

“Five years ago, the Prime Minister asked me to lead a joint effort to bring about a workable formula that would transform the Western Wall into, in his own words, ‘one wall for one people.’

“After four years of intense negotiations, we reached a solution that was accepted by all major denominations and was then adopted by the government and embraced by the world's Jewish communities.

“Today’s decision signifies a retreat from that agreement and will make our work to bring Israel and the Jewish world closer together increasingly more difficult.

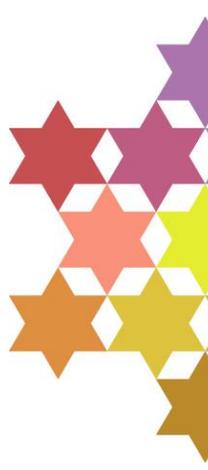
“The Jewish Agency nevertheless remains staunchly committed to that work and to the principle of one wall for one people.”

This is not business as usual. The leadership of The Jewish Agency cancelled a scheduled dinner with Prime Minister Netanyahu and during the course of the emergency meeting, the Board unanimously adopted what will undoubtedly be a historic resolution. (see appendix)

As leaders in the Jewish world, we ask that you please join us in denouncing the government decision. As a first step, please forward this email to your P2G family, including our thousands of steering committee members, program participants, your colleagues and friends, etc. Be as proactive as possible. **As a next step, we are organizing a petition which you yourself will be able to sign and encourage others to join in as well.**

We know that there is no confusion. We know that we stand united as one Jewish people – Israelis supporting overseas Jewry and overseas Jewry supporting the Israeli people. But we cannot stand idle as decisions so blatantly tear at the inner fabric of the Jewish people. **Make your voice heard.**

We thank you and will continue to communicate with you on this grave matter.



APPENDIX I:

The Jewish Agency for Israel The Board of Governors

June 2017

Jerusalem
Resolution

Tamuz 5777

Whereas the Jewish Agency for Israel, representing world Jewry through its constituent members, the World Zionist Organization, the Jewish Federations of North America and Keren Hayesod, is gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem, the liberation of the Western Wall and the founding of the Zionist movement in Basel 120 years ago; and

Whereas the Jewish Agency for Israel throughout its history has been the organization responsible for bringing olim to the State of Israel and connecting Israel and world Jewry; and

Whereas the proposed conversion bill that would cement the Chief Rabbinate's monopoly on conversion has the devastating potential to permanently exclude hundreds of thousands of Israelis from being a part of the Jewish people; and

Whereas we deplore yesterday's decision by Government of Israel which contradicts the agreement reached with the Jewish Agency and other parties to establish the Kotel as a unifying symbol for Jews around the world, as stated: '**ONE WALL FOR ONE PEOPLE**'; and

Whereas the Government of Israel's decisions have a deep potential to divide the Jewish people and to undermine the Zionist vision and dream of Herzl, Ben-Gurion, and Jabotinsky to establish Israel as a national home for the entire Jewish people; and

Whereas we declare that we cannot and must not allow this to happen and we are committed to mobilizing our constituencies for their continued support of the people and state of Israel;

Therefore, be it resolved that

- We call upon each Member of the Knesset and all elected public officials to take all necessary action to ensure that these dangerous and damaging steps are halted; and
- We will continue to build a broad coalition of Israelis, together with partners from around the world, who care passionately about keeping our people united and who are committed to the unity of the Jewish people; and
- We call upon the Government of Israel to understand the gravity of its steps and reverse its course of action accordingly.

Natan Sharansky
Chair of the Executive

Charles Horowitz Ratner
Chair of the Board

Michael Siegal
Chair Elect of the Board

