

If you Care about Israel, Silence is no Longer an Option!

A Call for Action from Israel

As concerned Jews and Israelis, we appeal to you to publicly express your concern about the current, critical situation in Israel, and to call for the State of Israel to return to the peaceful, moral, democratic, and humanistic values we all cherish. We are sending you this urgent appeal because we believe that, as liberal Jews, you share the humanistic values of our Jewish heritage, and support our struggle to prevent the deterioration of Israeli society.

Liberal Jews all over have always struggled to make this world a better place — “*tikkun olam*” in the tradition of the Prophets. Just as you struggle against immoral and antidemocratic acts everywhere and raise your voices against the discrimination of Jews in other countries, you must make your voices heard when it comes to Israel’s deviation from our Judaic-humanistic tradition as it veers from its moral, peace-seeking and democratic path.

In recent years, we have witnessed dramatic changes in Israel’s course. The growing dominance of nationalistic, expansionist, and anti-democratic ideologies, goals and policies have already crossed the democratic and moral red lines. The ongoing occupation of the West Bank and the expansion of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories violate the basic human and collective rights of the Palestinians and tear apart the democratic and moral fabric of Israeli society — as does the past government’s refusal to engage in meaningful negotiations with the Palestinians and the Arab world that could bring about a peaceful settlement to the ongoing conflict. The past government

ignored the Arab Peace Initiative, which was launched at the Arab Summit Conference in Beirut in 2002 and which called for the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, alongside the State of Israel in exchange for ending the conflict, peace, and normalizing relations. Instead, it forged ahead with its expansionist policies that, if not halted soon, will render a two-state solution impossible. In carrying out these policies, the government did not only violate international law, but at times also broke Israeli laws, thus seriously undermining the very foundation of Israeli democracy. We are witnessing continuous, systematic and often successful attempts to pass laws that contradict the fundamental democratic principle of equal treatment of minorities. The past government initiated educational policies that gradually erode the humanistic and democratic values in education, and imparts narrow, nationalistic and intolerant values instead. There have been systematic attempts to silence criticism of Israeli policies and delegitimize dissenting voices in academia, the media, and NGOs. Attempts to control the legal system by attacking the Supreme Court and limit its independence recur repeatedly. We are also witnessing increasing attempts by extremist religious forces to extend their monopolistic practices in different realms of life and attack other religious denominations. Altogether, we can identify serious deviations from the moral and democratic compass that ought to guide our society towards equality, freedom, and justice (attached is a document that illustrates many such alarming acts).

As a significant minority in Israel we need you to be partners in our patriotic efforts to save Israel and ensure that it will remain a society that embodies the vision of its founding fathers, as enshrined in the Israeli Declaration of Independence. Our voices must be heard loud and clear, so that it will be known that a moral and humane

Judaism exists, and has the courage not only to criticize injustice and immorality elsewhere, but also to denounce it in when they take place in Israel. **This is an ultimate expression of our concern and love for Israel.** It is our shared responsibility towards future generations, who will pay a heavy price for our silence and passivity. The cost of silence far exceeds the cost of involvement. What is at stake is no less than the future of the State of Israel, Israeli society, and the Jewish people.

Yes, it is true that vicious attempts are made to ostracize and delegitimize those who criticize the policies and actions of the government of Israel, both here in Israel and in Jewish communities around the world. We know all the arguments against the expression of criticism, as spelled out by the authorities. There is a growing monopolization of patriotism, even of the term Zionism, which recognizes only one ideology, one goal, and one policy as legitimate and patriotic. All other views are branded as harmful to the state of Israel and the Jewish people. Valid criticism is depicted as “anti-Semitic,” “anti-Israel,” or even as expressing “self-hatred.” This approach aims to silence critical voices by arousing fear, and constitutes a powerful tool that has been used over and over again by antidemocratic forces in different societies. It has repeatedly led not only to the limitation of freedom, but has also had disastrous consequences for these societies. In recent years, forces advocating this approach in Israel have become more open and daring, and are now well represented in various institutions of the society. Mankind has learned the hard way that silence and ignorance do not change grim realities, and that only critical thinking, free discourse, and open criticism can lead to progress.

We all admire individuals like Émile Zola, who had the courage to draw attention to French society's departure from just and moral codes, by accusing the French Army of obstruction of justice and anti-Semitism in wrongly convicting Alfred Dreyfus. He did not hesitate to criticize the French leaders in times of tension between France and Prussia, and paid a heavy price for his daring. Like Zola we should not remain mere bystanders at the sight of Israel's deviation from basic moral and democratic codes. The nationalistic-religious segments of world Jewry openly assist and support the misdirected policies of the present government — politically, financially, and organizationally — while many in the liberal Jewish camp stand by, hesitant to voice their concern.

If we all remain paralyzed, we will eventually lose the foundation of our common Jewish identity to which Israel contributes much. We must speak out as members of the Jewish people, precisely because of our love for Israel. It is our responsibility to deal with situations where there are significant departures from moral codes and norms, both within the family and within the wider community. As liberal Jews who care about their Jewishness and are attached to Israel, we all need to be part of the struggle to save Israel from the nationalist, antidemocratic, and xenophobic currents that are taking hold.

We must all voice our reservations and criticism loudly and clearly. It is our responsibility to speak out and take action, as an ultimate expression of our identity and conscience. Ultimately, history will judge us by our actions.