

## ZIONISM AND ISRAEL

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### THE RABBINIC CONFERENCE

We recognise the unique role which the Land of Israel has played in the history, prayers and hopes of our people through the ages. We also acknowledge that the discrimination and persecution, culminating in the *Shoah* (Holocaust), which have so often been the lot of our people during the centuries of this dispersion, have made the re-establishment of an autonomous Jewish community in our ancient homeland a matter of absolute necessity. We therefore salute the Pioneers of Zionism and the founders and defenders of the State of Israel whose vision and courage have turned that dream into reality.

We reaffirm our love for the Land of Israel, our solidarity with our brothers and sisters who dwell within its borders, and our commitment to the State of Israel. We rejoice in its existence, delight in its future, and hope for the ever fuller realisation of the ideals of justice and equality for all its citizens set forth in its Declaration of Independence, so that it may become more and more a force for good in the life of the Jewish people, of the Middle East region and of humanity.

We also reaffirm our faith in the Diaspora. In spite of the sufferings our people have experienced in dispersion, there have been nations which have welcomed Jews as citizens,

and periods of Jewish religious and cultural creativity stimulated by close contact with other religions and cultures. Moreover, as a universal religion, Judaism is in principle at home anywhere on God's earth, and since it has a redemptive contribution to make to the life of humanity (to be 'a light to the nations'), it is positively desirable that there should be a Jewish presence in many lands. We therefore urge the importance of maintaining strong, confident and self-respecting Jewish communities in the Diaspora.

We endorse Rabbi Leo Baeck's perception of the Jewish people as an ellipse having two foci. Israel and the Diaspora have somewhat different roles to play, but they both exist for the same ultimate purpose, defined by Judaism, and should therefore be seen as equal partners in a common task.

We desire to see a constructive relationship, of mutual respect, support and enrichment between Israel and the Diaspora. We believe that the Diaspora has the responsibility of sharing in the development of the State of Israel as a haven of refuge and a society where Jews can live in dignity and set an example to humankind. We therefore urge our communities to continue and intensify all appropriate endeavours, including cultural activities, financial

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support for humanitarian purposes in Israel, and the encouragement of individual and group visits to Israel, towards that end.

We believe that these endeavours should include the presentation of *Aliyah* (emigration to Israel) as a noble option available to Diaspora Jews, and the encouragement of those who choose to seek their self-fulfilment, and to make their contribution to Jewish life, in that way. However, we reaffirm our belief that full participation in Jewish life in the Diaspora, to ensure its continuation, is equally honourable.

We demand full acceptance of the principle of religious pluralism, with all its implications, both in Israeli law and in the Zionist and communal organisations of the Diaspora. This requires that Progressive Judaism, as well as Conservative Judaism, be accorded recognition and respect, rights and opportunities, on terms of absolute equality with Orthodox Judaism. We regard this as a matter of justice, which is therefore independent of numerical considerations, and non-negotiable.

We believe that the Israel-Diaspora partnership requires mutual respect as well as open, candid and vigorous discussion of common concerns between the partners and within each.

Such discussion should not exclude responsible criticism of particular governmental policies or other aspects of Israeli society, expressed with loving concern and due deliberation.

For every possible reason, including its own long-term survival, Israel's greatest need is to "seek peace and pursue it" (Psalm 34:15). We recognise that there is room for a variety of views as to the best way of attaining that objective, but it seems to us self-evident that the whole ethos of Judaism in general, and of Liberal Judaism in particular, should incline us towards the view of those who would cede territory for lasting peace. Reconciliation between Jews and Arabs is a goal towards which we strive. Concern for secure borders and political and military stability needs to be seen as compatible with justice for all. The legitimate security demands of Israel can – and must – be reconciled with the human and political rights of Palestinians. It is for all these reasons that we support the concept of territorial compromise.

We believe that we have a Jewish religious duty to foster, especially within British Jewry, a climate of opinion supportive of the quest for peace. This requires us to keep ourselves well informed, to seek an

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## LIBERAL JEWISH VALUES

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objective understanding of the issues, and to exemplify and encourage the forces of moderation and reconciliation rather than those of strident partisanship.

We applaud all sincere peace initiatives, directed at both creating a State of Palestine alongside the State of Israel, and establishing the conditions for peaceful co-existence between the two peoples. Likewise we welcome all contacts and conversations between the protagonists of the conflict in the Middle East and their respective supporters in Britain which may help to lessen tension, dispel ignorance, overcome mistrust, and build bridges of understanding.

We call upon all States which have not already done so to recognise the State of Israel and establish normal relations with it. We ask all religious communities to try to understand the importance of the State of Israel for the Jewish people. We pledge ourselves to work together with all nations and religions for the achievement of peace in the Middle East, and for the cessation of war, terrorism and all forms of violence, the relief of suffering, and the establishment of justice, in all societies everywhere.

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**Liberal Judaism**

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