

The Moment We Are In, The Future We Pray For

A Statement from Reform Movement Institutions

January 30, 2024 - With an eye toward the future we envision, we offer these steps we hope Israelis and Palestinians will take at this moment of intense challenge and deep pain. We do so because of the bond and love we feel for our Israeli siblings.

Our commitment to a strong, vibrant, Jewish and democratic state of Israel, secure within its borders, is unyielding. The October 7th attacks and subsequent war have made unequivocally clear the existential threats facing Israel. On October 7th, more than 1200 Israelis were brutally murdered and tortured including those victimized by sexual violence, and communities were destroyed. Since then, a quarter of a million people have been displaced due to Hamas and Hezbollah violence and more than 135 hostages taken from Israel remain in Gaza. The Jewish people and the nation are again in mourning, now for the loss of over 200 soldiers fighting to defend Israel - including 25 killed in just one day last week. We pray for healing of wounded soldiers and for comfort for the bereaved. Israel is also contending with attacks from the Houthis and other Iranian proxies. Our hearts are with the Israeli people, now and always, as we pray for the day when the joyful sounds of peace prevail over the terrifying sounds of war.

Israel's leaders have no greater responsibility than protecting the Israeli people. Hamas's October 7th attacks were utterly heinous. Israel's goal of eradicating Hamas's military capabilities is just given Hamas's ongoing commitment to Israel's destruction. Hamas must be held accountable and the more than 135 remaining hostages must be released immediately. In keeping with the mitzvah of *Pidyon Shvu'im* (Redemption of Captives), Israel's government must do all it can to ensure the hostages' swift and safe deliverance from Hamas's nefarious hands. We also encourage and applaud the Biden administration's efforts in this regard.

Hamas showed no regard for the humanity of those butchered, brutalized, and kidnapped on October 7th. As Jews, we reject such dehumanization of the "other" including Palestinians. Whatever the military necessities of Israel's massive bombing in Gaza, both to reach Hamas's military infrastructure, so deeply embedded by Hamas into the centers of Palestinian civilian life, as well as to eliminate Hamas's capabilities to repeat October 7th, we nonetheless agonize over the many thousands of Palestinian civilians, including large numbers of women and children, who have died and been wounded in this conflict - whether by Israeli bombs or Hamas's misfired missiles. We agonize, too, over the nearly 2 million displaced people who are unable to obtain life essentials of food, water, shelter, medicine, and electricity.

The peaceful future we dream of includes an end to the West Bank occupation. As our respective organizations have affirmed in resolutions, formal statements, and policy analyses going back decades, ongoing West Bank occupation without a willingness to seek its end through a peaceful resolution of the conflict will condemn future generations

to endless strife. Reestablishing settlements in Gaza will have a similarly detrimental impact. Denying the Palestinians' right to self-determination is an impediment to peace.

In this darkest of times, we remain committed to a resolution of the conflict that will ensure Israel's security and allow for Palestinian self-determination and self-governance, understanding that the creation of a Palestinian state will pose serious short-term security threats to Israel that will need to be addressed in any peace accords. Further, the widespread distrust of the Palestinians and their leadership in both Gaza and the West Bank, as well as deep Palestinian mistrust of Israel's leadership, will require significant efforts by the Israelis, Palestinians, regional neighbors, and the international community to make such a resolution a viable reality. A successful and peaceful Palestinian entity remains vital to ensuring Israel's long-term security. For these reasons, we are deeply dismayed by Prime Minister Netanyahu's recent comments dismissing the possibility of a future peaceful Palestinian state.

There is much the Palestinian Authority needs to do in the short run to help prevent the escalation of violence both in the West Bank and more broadly, including joining the international community in actively engaging in efforts to ensure the hostages' release, restoring cooperation with the Israeli security forces to curtail terrorist activities emanating from the West Bank, and taking concrete steps to halt incitement to violence and incentives for acts of terrorism. Far more extensive reforms and concrete manifestations of its commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, including steps in a peace process that will ensure Israel's security, will be required.

Israel's future security relies on non-military steps Israel can and must take including:

- Recognizing that Israel's security and well-being are enhanced by a future that includes a peaceful Palestinian state.
- In keeping with the existing Abraham accords, continuing to pave the way toward normalized relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia and to the creation of a regional coalition to rebuild Gaza.
- Protecting the longstanding and vital U.S.-Israel alliance that has served the interests of both nations for more than 75 years.
- Stopping incitement to violence, racism, and use of dehumanizing language against Palestinians by government ministers and others.
- Forcefully addressing settler violence against Palestinians.
- Preventing the collapse of the Palestinian Authority, including through the delivery of tax revenue currently being delayed by Israel.
- Strengthening the development of Palestinian leaders and institutions committed to pursuing peace, as evidenced by supporting those advocating reforms of the Palestinian Authority's governance, education, leadership, transparency, and accountability.
- Understanding the terribly complex current battlefield in Gaza, continuing to do everything possible to prevent the loss of life among innocent Gazans not directly involved in the hostilities.

- Delivering swift and regular humanitarian aid to Gazans struggling against illness and hunger, with safeguards monitored by the international community to ensure that such aid is not diverted to Hamas.
- Rejecting any suggestions of forced relocation of Palestinians from Gaza; such relocation would be in clear violation of international law.
- Committing to ending the occupation, based on a negotiated, diplomatic solution acceptable to Israel and Palestinians alike. Such a solution will fulfill the Palestinian right to self-determination, without which Israel will never be safe and secure.
- Halting the construction of West Bank settlements and rejecting any Jewish resettlement in Gaza.
- Opposing any efforts toward unilateral annexation by Israel of areas of the West Bank.

We share these steps understanding that responsibility for building a future in which children can grow in peace requires commitments and leadership from Israelis and Palestinians. We speak inspired by the teaching, "Kol yisrael arevim zeh ba'zeh," "All of Israel and the Jewish people are responsible, one for the other" (Shevuot 39a). We are committed to the safety and vitality of the Jewish people, the swift return home of all the hostages held in Gaza, and a secure and just state of Israel - now and forever.