

Draft for a Covenant between the State of Israel and the North American Jewish Community -Wexner Summit April 2017

We, citizens of the state of Israel and members of the North American Jewish Community (NAJC), propose the following Covenant to structure and guide our mutual relationships. We urge members of both communities to support the Covenant as individuals and to urge their state and voluntary organizations to adopt it as a formal statement of their understanding of this relationship.

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We as formal and informal representatives of the state of Israel and the North American Jewish Community (NAJC), recognize and profoundly value the historic partnership and the deep and indissoluble ties and bonds between our two communities, the two largest Jewish centers of our era.

This partnership was articulated in 1950 in a correspondence between Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and the American Jewish Committee president Jacob Blaustein. In the seven decades since, our communities have flourished, developed, and changed in significant and relevant ways.

We assert the urgent need to respond to these changes by formally restating our relationship in a way that will strengthen our partnership in the near and distant future, and enhance our ties and bonds through the active participation, creativity and investment of as many members of each community as possible.

Part I – The Basis of Our Relationship

The State of Israel and the NAJC are committed to a relationship of partnership and equality in the shared enterprise of Jewish peoplehood and its success.

We affirm that we share foundational understandings, purposes, and goals deeply rooted in Jewish tradition religion and history

- a. ***Zehut Yehudit*** – *Jewish identity*. We affirm the value of connecting to and identifying with a Jewish culture that spans and encompasses time and space. This culture is grounded in the Tanakh, Rabbinic tradition and in orienting practices such as the Jewish calendar. We celebrate that this culture and literature continue to flourish in manifold ways today, including the artistic productions of both our communities.
- b. ***Arevut*** - *Mutual responsibility*. We hold a commitment at the personal, communal, and national level to support and help one another at all times, regardless of differences and divides, especially in the face of difficulty and hardships.

- c. *Tzelem Elokim - Individual dignity.* We recognize in theory and in practice the infinite and intrinsic value and potential of every human being. This recognition encompasses the values of democracy and the protection of inalienable individual and minority rights that are enshrined in Israel's Declaration of Independence, the US Constitution, and the Canadian Bill of Rights.
- d. *Tzedek – Justice.* We must always be a clarion voice calling for vigilance, pursuing justice in all human relations and societies and providing for “the stranger, the orphan and the widow at our gates.” This commitment encompasses an obligation to respect marginalized citizens to provide for the most vulnerable in our societies, both within and outside of our Jewish communities.
- e. *Tziyonut - Zionism.* We celebrate the return of the Jewish people to its historic roots and sovereignty in the Land of Israel, and its promise for guaranteeing a Jewish future. We affirm that our celebration of Zionism goes hand in hand with our commitment to the NAJC and its vital ongoing contributions to Jewish life, in the tradition of the simultaneous Talmudic cultures of Babylonia and Jerusalem. We also recognize the responsibilities and obligations of the State to its Arab and other non-Jewish citizens and residents.
- f. *Shalom - Peace.* We see ourselves as obligated not only to maintain peace but to pursue peace between Israel and its neighbors.
- g. *Or L’Goyim - Light unto the nations.* We understand Jewishness as neither a right nor a privilege, but rather as an obligation to serve as a moral and ethical exemplar, including the willingness to stand alone for the sake of principle. This obligation applies both to the sovereign state of Israel and to Jewish communities in other countries.

Despite operating within a framework of partnership and equality, we recognize that Israel and the NAJC have different Jewish interests, understandings and practices. Partnership and equality do not require perfect symmetry of influence. They do require mutual compassion, shared basic principles, and a commitment to work together to implement those principles. We acknowledge the right and obligation to express our values and concerns to each other; to listen to each other with deep and sustained attention; and, recognizing the imperative that the Jewish peoplehood enterprise be a shared one, to do our best to support each other even at the cost of some self-interest.

We also acknowledge each other's right, after diligent efforts, to act in accordance with conscience even when doing so infringes on the other's deep sensibilities, important values, or central interests. When such deep disagreements occur, we will make every effort to strengthen the relationship in other ways and areas rather than acting in ways that exacerbate the damage that may be done to the relationship by any intractable differences that do exist.

Part II – Mutual Obligations

The State of Israel hereby declares:

1. The State of Israel is the homeland of the Jewish people, and as such will keep its doors open to every Jew who chooses to make *aliya* (immigrate), Israel will invite all members of the NAJC to visit, invest time, and participate in meaningful professional, educational, social, economic or other aspects of Israeli life.
2. When taking major decisions that affect the Jewish people as a whole, the State of Israel will take into consideration the NAJC as well as other Jewish communities.
3. Because certain foreign policy or national security decisions taken by the State of Israel may also have a major effect on the NAJC as well as other Jewish communities, the State of Israel shall take these implications into consideration.
4. The State of Israel will make itself available and invest resources for all efforts by all elements of the NAJC to ensure their own flourishing continuity, including but not limited to visits to Israel, Jewish Studies scholarships, the study of Hebrew, and social justice projects.
5. Through reciprocal efforts, the State of Israel will continuously seek to deepen its understanding of the North American Jewish Community, including through the State's educational system.
6. The State of Israel is committed to providing equal rights, liberty, and justice for all its citizens, regardless of faith, ethnicity, race or specific religious denomination.
7. The State of Israel will respect, recognize, and promote diverse expressions of Judaism and will conduct ongoing dialogue with the NAJC on issues that bear directly on the definition and character of Jewish peoplehood.

The NAJC hereby declares:

1. The NAJC will foster in all its members a love of Israel and a sense of responsibility to it.
2. The NAJC will identify with Israel's successes and failures, celebrate its achievements and empathize with its losses.
3. The NAJC will support Israel against all existential threats and efforts to de-legitimize it.
4. The NAJC will support and participate in Israel by various actions. Among those it will, sponsor, foster and encourage:

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- (a) The substantive education of Jews and non-Jews on Israeli history, culture and society and on current issues facing Israel;
 - (b) Economic, academic, civic and cultural ties and projects between North America and Israel;
 - (c) Jewish and non-Jewish travel to and experience in Israel;
 - (d) *Aliyah*;
 - (e) Philanthropy to Israeli institutions;
 - (f) Information sharing, technology sharing and other for-profit and not-for-profit joint ventures between the two communities.
5. The NAJC will devote substantial resources to substantive Jewish education, which will include the study of Judaism, Hebrew and the culture and history of Israel.
6. The NAJC will reach out and welcome Israelis living in North America, making every effort to integrate them into the community.

PART III - SHARED PLATFORM

Recognizing these shared values and mutual obligations, we call for the establishment of a unique platform to facilitate and encourage engagement of the two communities and to participate in an ongoing dialogue on issues of mutual interest and concern. The overarching goal of the platform will be to enhance the relationship and to serve as a vehicle for shared decision making and for dealing with conflicts and disputes between the two communities. Through this new platform, we seek to foster new and creative ways to connect and share through direct conversations between members of the two communities. We strive to channel many more people into participating in and influencing the dialogue between the communities in discussions that are open, unbinding and non-hierarchical.

We invite all interested parties to participate in this project of *Arvut Hadadit* (mutual responsibility). The platform will affirm that different voices not only can but ought to participate and be heard, and will be based on principles of pluralism and equality.

Taking a proactive part in this shared platform, members from both communities will initiate discussions and dialogues between individuals, groups, organizations and communities on issues of mutual interest and concern

We commit to the creation of a Task Force to plan, construct and launch the operation of this platform.

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