

Reform Movement Statement on Prime Minister Netanyahu's Initiative to Bring the Racist Otzma Yehudit Party into the Government

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For the sake of Zion I will not be silent, For the sake of Jerusalem I will not be still, Till her victory emerge resplendent, And her triumph like a flaming torch. (Isaiah 62:1)

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February 26, 2019 – The Reform Movement strongly condemns the recent initiative of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to bring loyalists of racist Rabbi Meir Kahane into the Knesset. Those who espouse an ideology of hate, intolerance, and incite violence have no place in the Jewish State let alone in her government.

The encouragement and courting of the Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power) party by the Prime Minister raises the most profound concerns, and stands in stark contrast to the promise of Israel's Declaration of Independence that states:

“The state of Israel will promote the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; will be based on precepts of liberty, justice and peace taught by the Hebrew prophets; will uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens without distinction of race, creed or sex...”

Rabbi Hara Person, incoming Chief Executive of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, noted that “As committed North American Jews and Zionists we must make clear that the Prime Minister’s initiative and the enabling and empowerment of such extremists will doubtless widen the growing rift between many North American Jews and Israel. We will not be silent while this hateful and racist ideology is invited into the Israeli government.”

How repugnant is Otzma Yehudit? Look at just one of their leaders—Ben Tzion Gopstein. Gopstein, the head of the extremist group Lehava, was previously indicted by the Attorney General. Lehava was founded in 2009 as “an organization to fight assimilation in the Holy Land.” Despite its best efforts to be seen as a legitimate organization with the chief goal of preventing assimilation, Lehava’s message, based on the teachings of Rabbi Meir Kahane, is that Arabs are the enemies of Israel and contact with them will cause a disaster. Lehava, and specifically its leader Ben Tzion Gopstein, preach hatred of Arabs and Christians through intimidation, racist incitement, and violent activity.

Rabbi Josh Weinberg, Vice President for Israel and Reform Zionism at the Union for Reform Judaism, also voiced concerns over the consequences of the Prime Minister’s decision. “It is simply reprehensible that PM Netanyahu would court Kahanist members of the far-right party Otzma Yehudit,” he said. “Their ideology of racism, sexism and extreme xenophobia should have no place in a Jewish and democratic state. Let us not forget that the Kach party was deemed illegal to run for the Knesset in the 1990s, and one need not look farther than their legislative agenda to understand why. Such extremism threatens the fabric of Israel’s democracy and the feeling of safety of Israel’s non-Jewish citizens. It does great disservice to those of us who are dedicated to defending Israel’s image abroad.”

Our Movement has been working for the past 7 years against Lehava and has submitted 45 inquiries to the Attorney General and the State’s Attorney regarding Gopstein’s record of incitement. The Reform Movement’s Israel Religious Action Center in Jerusalem submitted a petition to the Attorney General pressing charges against the organization for incitement to racism and violence, and calling on the government to treat Lehava as a criminal organization.

Rabbi Rick Jacobs, President of the Union for Reform Judaism, added: “We stand up for Israel every day, everywhere. And we will always do so. Prime Minister Netanyahu’s outreach to these unrepentant racists and hate-mongers makes that work more and more difficult.”

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About the Union for Reform Judaism

The Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) builds community at every level—from the way we collaborate with congregations, organizations, and individuals to how we make connections across North America to advance contemporary and inclusive Jewish life. Providing vision and voice to transform the way people connect to Judaism, we help congregations stay relevant and innovative, motivate more young Jews to embrace Jewish living, agitate for a more progressive society, and foster meaningful connections to Israel.

Founded in 1873, URJ has grown into the largest and most powerful force in North American Jewish life, with nearly 900 member congregations and work that inspires, connects, and educates millions of people. Our legacy, reach, leadership, and vision mean that we can unite thousands of years of tradition with a modern, evolving Judaism to strengthen Jewish communities today and for future generations.

Visit us at www.URJ.org (https://urj.org/?utm_source=PREmails&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=PR) to learn about our social justice initiatives, camps and programs for young Jews, services for congregations and communities, and how you can work with us to create a more just, whole, and compassionate world. Enjoy related content at ReformJudaism.org ([https://reformjudaism.org/?](https://reformjudaism.org/?utm_source=PREmails&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=PR)

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