

Area clergy sign letter against annexation

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By Brett M. Rhyne
Advocate staff



MASSACHUSETTS – Four dozen rabbis and cantors from our region have joined 600 American clergy in signing a public letter warning the Israeli government's proposed unilateral annexation in the West Bank "would be a catastrophic mistake" that would "violate human rights, weaken democracy, and make Israelis and Palestinians less secure."

"Annexation would be a breach of human rights and international law, not to mention the politics of morality and justice," says one of the signatories, Rabbi Andy Vogel of Temple Sinai in Brookline.

Rabbi Vogel proposes a more bilateral approach.

"Ideally, the Israeli government would engage in true

negotiations with Palestinians and their leadership, in good faith, with a goal of coming to a bilateral negotiated solution," he says. "Unilateral annexation is intended to end any possibility of creating a Palestinian state. It destroys the possibility of that negotiated resolution in the future, and is an act of outright theft of territory whose status has yet to be resolved through negotiations.

"It also fundamentally betrays the democratic values of Israel, and is an immoral act

that further crushes Palestinians in their daily lives," he adds.

The letter speaks directly to the Israeli government.

"As rabbis, cantors, and seminary students who deeply love Israel and care about its future," the letter states, "we urge all members of the Jewish community to call on the Israeli government to abandon plans for annexing all or part of the West Bank as early as this summer.

"We hold fast to the vision," it continues, "laid out in the state's Declaration of Independence, that Israel will be 'based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex.'"

The letter was written and circulated by the Progressive Israel Network, a coalition of 10 progressive pro-Israel groups, whose members comprise Ameinu, Americans for Peace Now, Habonim Dror North America, Hashomer Hatzair, the Jewish Labor Committee, J Street, the New Israel Fund, Partners for Progressive Israel, Reconstructing Judaism, and T'ruah.

Some clergy who signed the letter see it as a defense of the two-state solution.

"I believe that annexation would be a disaster for the peace process, by signaling Israeli rejection of a two-state solution," says Cantor Vera Broekhuysen, of Temple Emanu-El of Haverhill.

"It would strike at human rights for Palestinians and Israelis," she says. "And it would make Israel significantly less safe. How can we hope for peace if Israel's government so thoroughly undercuts Palestinian self-determination and the struggle for an economically viable, physically cohesive Palestinian state?"

"The Israeli national anthem is 'Hatikva,' 'The Hope.' Jews are in the hope business," notes Rabbi Mike Rothbaum of Congregation Beth Elohim in Acton.

"By contrast," he says, "annexing a land without giving full rights to its residents will destroy the hopes of millions of Palestinians, plant despair and desperation in their hearts, bring bloodshed to the doors of Arab and Jewish homes, create disillusionment among millions of American Jews, destabilize the entire Middle East, and give truth to the falsehood that our beloved homeland is an apartheid state.

"Any rabbi who loves Israel must speak clearly and forcefully against this dangerous *narishkeit*," Rabbi Rothbaum adds.

Rabbi Victor Reinstein of the Nehar Shalom Community Synagogue in Jamaica Plain frames the letter in strong terms.

"Annexation marks a culminating moment in more than half a century of occupation, normalizing the subjugation of another people, creating an apartheid system whose reality will no longer be a



matter of debate, dashing Palestinian aspirations and thereby the possibility of a just and lasting peace," he says. "For Israel and the Jewish people, annexation will mark the tragic consequence of a decades long process that has seen the corrosion of foundational Jewish values through a numbing of conscience."

The letter argues, "Annexing all or part of the West Bank would mean turning Palestinians living there into non-citizen residents of Israel, without the legal rights or voting rights of citizens.

"This would be a catastrophic mistake," it continues. It goes on to list a number of the ill effects of annexation, including:

- "leaving a series of disconnected Palestinian enclaves without real independence, freedom of movement, or hope of genuine statehood and self-determination;"
- "place Israel in flagrant violation of international laws and undermine its status as a democracy, with the Palestinians under annexation becoming permanent second-class inhabitants living under a different system of rights and laws than the Jewish

Israelis who will enjoy the rights of full citizenship”; and

- “profoundly weaken the bipartisan consensus of support that Israel has enjoyed in the U.S. for decades.”

Other area clergy signing the letter include Rabbis Joshua Chasan of Portland, Maine, Howard Cohen of Bennington, Vt., Michelle Dardashti of Providence, R.I. and Robin Nafshi of Concord, N.H.; and Rabbis Serena Fujita of Somerville, David Jaffe of Sharon, Randy Kafka of Stoughton, Karen Landy of Brookline, Richard Meirowitz of Peabody, Allison Peiser of Marblehead, David Seidenberg of Northampton, Keith Stern of Newton, Ora Weiss of Newton, David Winship of Canton and Henry Zoob of Westwood.

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