

Israel Horizons

February 2020



President's Message:

Meretz is Not Lost

The essay below tries to unravel the political calculations made before the March 2 election, and the necessary post-election reflection that the Israeli Left should engage in. However, ultimately, Israeli citizens in Israel will make those decisions and there's a limited amount we in the US can do to affect their choices.

*Nevertheless, as other articles in this issue of IH explain, there is an election that we as American Jews can participate in and make our voices heard. That would be the World Zionist Organization (WZO) elections held every five years; this year from Jan. 21 through March 11. Partners for Progressive Israel is a primary originator of the HATIKVAH Progressive Israel Slate. The "polls" are open and you can simply [click this link](#) and vote in 5 minutes from your phone or computer. **VOTE!***

Days before the deadline for submission of electoral lists for Israel's March 2 election (the 3rd within 11 months), Meretz and Labor announced an election "partnership" (*shutfut*) under Labor's banner. It was a shotgun marriage of sorts; despite the rhetoric, everyone involved knew that the arrangement was not particularly appealing, but was arrived at in order to stave off a not unlikely disaster. Without running together on one slate, very possibly one, or conceivably both of the parties might fall below the 3.25% threshold. Not only might that party disappear (most likely Meretz, which scraped through the last election with a bare 4 seats, the smallest party in the Knesset), but its votes would be irretrievably wasted. It brings little solace that the identical process was taking place simultaneously on the far right; with half a dozen grouplets and would-be parties struggling to align themselves so as to let no vote be wasted, and to maximize their influence on Likud, should it be able to form a coalition.

Contents

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

- 01 Meretz is Not Lost

WORLD ZIONIST CONGRESS ELECTIONS - HATIKVAH SLATE

- 03 Hatikvah Slate
- 04 So Why is it Important to Vote?
By Harlan Baker
- 05 My Vote is My Voice
By Serena Oberstein
- 06 Millennials, It is Time to Make Our Power Known
By Zach Shartiag
- 08 Report from the October 2019 Zionist General Council
By David Dormont
- 10 Hatikvah Platform
- 11 Why Vote Hatikvah?

KOLOT

- 12 Ir Amim: Preserving Jerusalem as the Present Home and Future Capital of Two Peoples
By Rachel Schwartz and Amy Cohen

CONVERSATIONS

- 15 Can Progressive Americans Contribute to a Revival of the Israeli Left?

The pathos of the Left's frantic struggle to merge before the deadline was not lost on anyone, though none spoke of it publicly. Meretz and Labor, with a combined total of 10 seats in the outgoing Knesset, are all that politically remains of the once-proud Labor movement that literally built the state and governed it for its first 29 years. A Jan. 14 poll showed the combined party receiving the same 10 seats; not great, but at least comfortably distant from the 3.25% threshold, below which looms political oblivion.

Although it was Meretz that had pleaded, cajoled, and demanded the merger, some of its leaders – and many American supporters – were unhappy with its result. They felt the “Zionist Left,” whose mantle they lay claim to, had given up too much, and what remained might not be worth salvaging. Many want Meretz to become an explicitly Jewish-Arab party, a rare (though not totally unique) actor on the Israeli political stage. This, they felt, was an opportunity to attract Arab voters – 40,000 of whom had voted for Meretz in the April 2019 election, though most switched to the reconstituted Joint List in the September vote. The situation was compounded by the combined list lacking an Arab candidate below 11th place, unlikely to make it into the Knesset.

I sympathize but disagree with this critical analysis, on both tactical and strategic grounds. I support the compromises that made it possible, – but I also believe strongly that after the election, whatever the results, the Left has to take a long, hard, and overdue look at itself, and remake itself so it becomes relevant for the future, which it is not now, despite its ideals and programs, both of which are appealing.

These are the reasons I support the compromise on which the partnership was based:

- It is essential to maintain Meretz as a parliamentary party. The Knesset needs a Left Zionist presence, even as a shadow of what it was.
- Meretz has not sold its soul by aligning with Labor. While Labor has wandered in the wilderness for two decades now in search of an ideology and/or an effective leader, its core principles are by no means foreign to Meretz. Amir Peretz, now titular leader of the list as a whole, comes out of the Labor left, not very different from Meretz.
- Meretz cannot become a Jewish-Arab party by simply choosing a few Arab members for realistic slots (of which there are only 4-5 under its control). The decision about what the party should become is one that has to be made soberly, not in the frenzy before a deadline.

- A certain percentage of Meretz's Jewish and Arab voters will choose to vote for the Joint List. That is not at all bad. With Ayman Odeh as its leader, the Joint List (10 out of its 13 MK's) chose Benny Gantz as their preferred prime ministerial candidate after the last election, a major step towards mainstreaming itself. While Meretz is “Zionist” and the Joint List is not, that makes little difference for most aspects of day-to-day politics.
- Given the current unity of the Joint List, there is no chance that a large number of Israeli Palestinians will come to Meretz, as they did in April, when the JL was split. Meretz will have to do some deep soul-searching before it can attract a significant number of Arab voters.

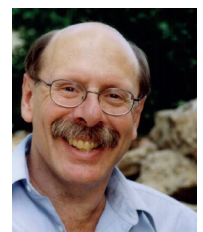
As pointed out by Yael Patir and Uri Zaki in the “Conversations” transcript in this issue of IH, the Israeli Left has been growing and strengthening itself in many areas – but not in electoral politics. It is time that those who have been working in unions, NGOs”, think tanks, human rights organizations, and a variety of other institutions come together and create a new party, building on the idealism of the old Israeli Left, but speaking in the idiom and setting out an agenda of the 21st century. This party must be Jewish-Arab at its core; not “anti-Zionist” but one that rests squarely on and accepts the paradox that Israel is – and should remain – both a Jewish and democratic state.

This party – it should go without saying – must demand equal rights and opportunities for all citizens and reject the Occupation. However, what that means in actual political and territorial terms has to be considered carefully, probably over time. What contours an Israel free of Occupation would take are not clear. This is not 1993 anymore and the “solution” – which must recognize Jewish as well as Palestinian rights to the land – must also connect the collective rights of the Jewish and Palestinian peoples to today's reality.

Those of us who stand behind the principles of the Left must be pragmatic when necessary and idealistic when possible. It is better to rebuild from somewhere than from nowhere.

Paul Scham

Paul Scham is President of Partners for Progressive Israel; Associate Research Professor of Israel Studies at the University of Maryland and Executive Director of its Gildenhorn Institute for Israel Studies.





HATIKVAH: Progressive Israel Slate is proudly supported by Aleph, Ameinu, Americans for Peace Now, Habonim Dror, Hashomer Hatzair, J Street, Jewish Labor Committee, New Israel Fund, National Council of Jewish Women, Partners for Progressive Israel and T'ruah along with Rabbis, social and environmental activists, academics, artists and others who have joined together to best represent you and your vision for a progressive Israel and world Jewry.

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So Why is it Important to Vote?

By Harlan Baker

“I don’t think I ever knew I could vote in the WZC. I read the Hatikvah platform; it’s amazing to find a party with which I agree 100%.” This was one of the many responses to my letter asking for support for the Hatikvah slate in the upcoming World Zionist Congress elections which will be held from January 21st through March 11th. People I have contacted had no idea that they had a voice in the decision making process of the WZC. Even people in local Jewish community organizations had no idea this election was taking place.

In the late 1980s I had no idea either. My participation in the election came from an unusual source, Carl Shier, a retired staff member of the United Auto Workers. He said he was going to vote in the WZC elections for the slate that included the Americans For Progressive Israel, and suggested that I do the same. Then he added, “My grandfather, a Bundist, will be turning over in his grave.”

This year’s election may have a greater potential for influencing decisions made at the World Zionist Congress than ever before. The Hatikvah slate, a coalition of 11 Jewish Organizations has been conducting an outreach campaign to their members about the importance of this vote. Hopefully we will be reaching more people who never thought they had a voice. Hatikvah is one of 13 slates that are vying for seats to the WZC.

So, why is it important to vote? Does my vote really count for anything? Will it change anything? The answer is “Yes.” It is important. In 2015 there were 56,737 votes cast in the election. 3,148 were cast for the Hatikvah slate, winning 8 seats. If we can triple that vote we could win over 20 seats and have a significant impact on the way the Zionist congress budget is allocated. This not only impacts the lives of Israelis, but has a profound effect on the lives of Palestinians as well.

Here is an example of how a strong progressive block can have an impact: the JNF funds for subsidizing settlements in

the West Bank. **If there are enough votes at the congress to prevent use of these funds that would displace Palestinians for settlement construction, then voting clearly makes a difference.**

An advantage of having a strong progressive block would be an increase in support for the Jewish Agency programs that encourage co-existence between Israeli Jews, Palestinian Israelis, and other non-Jewish minorities.

In addition, by having more Hatikvah delegates in Jerusalem, it will be possible to form coalitions with other slates on specific issues we agree on.

I’ve voted in past elections. This year I decided to run to be a delegate. If I get people who know me but who have never voted before in these elections to vote, then my participation will be worth it.



As a former Democratic state legislator and current local Democratic committee officer, I’ve spent most of my adult life working on voter turnout. Many times I have encountered people who tell me they are not going to vote because they think it doesn’t matter. My answer

has been, **“Not voting is a vote. By not voting you are ceding issues to people that will vote.”** For those of us in the progressive camp, we cannot afford to cede any more issues. ■

Harlan Baker lives in Portland, Maine and is vice chair of the Cumberland County Democratic Committee.



My Vote is My Voice

By Serena Oberstein

The year 2020 marks the 100th anniversary of women in the United States winning the right to vote. As a member of one of the last groups of people to secure a voice at the table, voting remains for me a civic obligation to fight for those who've been silenced by history, including people of color, immigrants and members of the LGBTQ+ community. This core value compelled me to join the Hatikvah Slate for the 38th World Zionist Congress.

Israel, founded on a progressive set of ideals, decades ago led the globe in women's rights with the 1969 elevation of Golda Meir to be Prime Minister. Today, soldiers who identify as LGBTQ+ openly serve in the military and government, while Israel remains the only country in the world that has a mandatory military service requirement for women. Simultaneously, Israel falls short by failing to protect women who want to pray at the Kotel. Amid a disturbing trend in which the leaders of Israel and the U.S. fail to confront gender discrimination and work to erode reproductive rights, it is imperative that we speak loudly and clearly. **The kol eisha – voice of women – must be one that is resounding in the 38th World Zionist Congress and the only way to ensure that is to vote for the Hatikvah Slate. Our vote is our voice.**

Just a decade ago, the World Zionist Organization mandated that slates include at least 30% women because most slates failed to do so. This year, the Hatikvah slate was the first to commit to creating a slate that is more than 50% women and gender nonbinary people. We include people and organizations that have come together to live our values here in the U.S. and because being Jewish and deeply Zionist resolutely informs those values.

I am proud to say I am in the company of women like Randi Weingarten who has spent her life fighting for the labor rights of teachers and Debra Katz, a leading lawyer protecting victims of sexual harassment and assault.

The Hatikvah Slate also includes Ruth Messenger and Nancy Kaufman, who, for decades, have led the Jewish community to actualize our values through their foundational work at the American Jewish World Service and the National Council for Jewish Women. Our slate includes women who are cultivating what the progressive Jewish community will look like through the work of Rabbi Jill Jacobs (T'ruah) and Sheila Katz (NCJW).

Joining the Hatikvah Slate is a great honor and a natural extension of my life's work. I have spent my career fighting to amplify the voices of those who too often are not heard, be it as a union organizer, the COO of a national nonprofit creating access to a more equitable education, advocating to uphold the Voting Rights Act, or a Californian working to repeal anti-LGBTQ+ laws. Now, the very rights I've fought to expand here in the United States are being threatened and nullified both in this country and in Israel. **As a lifelong Zionist and a fierce progressive, I've come together with others to ensure that democracy, gender equity, immigrant, and LGBTQ+ rights, continue to be cultivated and protected in Israel.**

The Israeli leadership has for the last two elections unabashedly suppressed voter turnout through racism and fear mongering. There is no telling whether the Prime Minister will be re-elected or removed from office. Regardless, we as Jews have a responsibility to uphold values "that will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants, based on justice, ensuring complete equality of social and political rights to all of its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex" as laid out in the Israeli Declaration of Independence.

In 1848, a group of abolitionists gathered in Seneca Falls, New York to discuss the lack of women's rights in the United States. It took 72 more years for them to win the right to vote. This May, Israel also turns 72. I hope to be in Israel at the World Zionist Congress this fall, working for the protection of the values espoused and realized by the women's suffrage movement: inclusivity, equity, democracy and a secure, Jewish Israel living in peace and security beside a sovereign Palestinian state. ■

Serena Oberstein is past president of the Los Angeles Ethics Commission who has worked to alleviate the root causes of poverty in government, on campaigns and throughout community organizations. For the past two decades, she's worked in the Jewish justice realm expanding civil rights and civil liberties.



Millennials, It is Time to Make Our Power Known

By Zach Shartiag

Scroll through social media, turn on the TV, read a newspaper, and there will probably be an article talking about Millennials ruining something. We've killed marriage, napkins, focus groups, wine corks, and home ownership, among other things. We also (allegedly) don't vote, are apathetic, and don't care about social issues. I've always been particularly struck by the claim that millennials have ruined institutional Jewish life.

I heard this when I worked as a campus director at a non-partisan Israel education non-profit and was asked by donors, leaders, and supervisors why this was happening. Millennials are deeply committed to human rights, and to making the world a better place. We are very globally aware, and our values are universal. For over 10 years, I have seen Jewish institutions and Israel move away from these universal values and the commitment to dignity and emancipation that are foundational both of Israel and of Judaism. It is time to shake the system up.

Contrary to popular belief, Gen Z and Millennials aren't apathetic about social issues. We're well-studied generations and poll after poll shows our top concerns include the environment, human rights, eliminating poverty and hunger, immigration, and LGBTQ+ rights but we are also unsure of how best to tackle the major issues that will affect and currently are affecting us, and that includes voting.

We do our best to live our values. An increasing number of Millennials and Gen Z'ers want to work for an ethical employer, whose company purpose and mission are backed up by its policies and practices. Why would we expect anything less from our local Federations and institutions? For example, the same institutions who wonder where Millennials are hiding also sponsor "pro-Israel" speakers who are anti-LGBTQ rights, anti-abortion, and racist. It shouldn't be a

surprise that Jewish youth choose to not affiliate with these institutions. The hypocrisy is rank, and we're tired of it.

Millennials, we have a chance to do something about this with the upcoming WZC elections. To change oppressive structures, we must get involved. It's challenging, difficult work. It is easy to dismiss the elections as serving a flawed institution. However, this is our chance, as proud progressives, to push back against the Zionist Right. They will show up, and if we fail to, we have effectively ceded our spot at the table. Conservatives understand the value of showing up to elections – we need only look at the devastation caused by ten years of conservative takeovers of school boards, city councils, and state legislatures to see what could happen to the WZC.

As progressives, we must resist creeping annexation, religious intolerance, and deepening divides between the Diaspora and Israel. Moreover, one billion dollars of annual funding and seats on long-term strategy and policy committees are on the line. These committees advise on policies regarding settlements, the Diaspora, Israel activities, anti-semitism, and religious issues – some of the most commonly cited areas of frustration for young American Jews.

How does your vote help reform a broken institution? With your votes, we can exert direct influence on committees that fund projects over the Green Line, working to close the open checkbook that pays for the occupation. We can make the committee on anti-semitism to take the issue of white supremacy seriously, and actually begin to fund initiatives to fight it from an institutional standpoint.

The current Israeli government incites violence against its Arab citizens, routinely insults Israel's LGBTQ community, and



Millennials, It is Time to Make Our Power Known

dismisses the diaspora. The Republican party has developed selective listening when it comes to anti-semitism, siding with a small, well-funded radical minority instead of listening to the large liberal majority of their Jewish constituents.

Seventy-nine percent of Jews voted for Democrats in 2018. Imagine if the American delegation at the WZC had that many members advocating for progressive values. That would start the structural changes that will impact me and other Millennials for years to come. If we don't vote, these institutions will continue to drive away young Jews. This is a critical turning point for our generation.

Only Hatikvah embodies the values of human rights, dignity for all, and true representation of the Jewish community. Over half the slate is women, we're located just about everywhere in America, and we have an incredible number of Jews of color, Sephardi, and Mizrahi Jews. **Hatikvah's platform embodies the values of Millennials and Gen Z – explicit commitments to the environment, human rights, a just two-state solution, and LGBT+ rights.** We speak explicitly about ensuring equal pay for equal work -- for Israeli, Palestinian, and American women. With over a billion dollars per year, we can transform our institutional priorities, I believe, for the better. It doesn't always

feel like institutions pay close attention to the grassroots, but they do – and it's time to make our power known.

The money that we can help allocate will make an actual difference in the lives of everyday Israelis. I am inspired by Israel's Declaration of Independence, which proclaims that Israel "will be based on the precepts of liberty, justice and peace as taught by the Prophets; and will uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of race, creed, or sex; and will guarantee full freedom of conscience, worship, education, and culture." Israel has been drifting away from these values, but it doesn't have to be this way. We can repair Millennials' relationship with institutions, build our relationship with Israel, and build a more just world for us, for Palestinians, and for everyone. ■

Zach Shartiag is a Higher Education consultant and former Jewish non-profit professional. He is the Deputy Secretary for the Young Democrats of America (YDA) and is the Political Director for the YDA Jewish Caucus. He is proudly running on the Hatikvah Slate for the World Zionist Congress elections and resides in West Lafayette, IN.



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Report from the October 2019 Zionist General Council

By David Dormont

The Zionist General Council (“ZGC”) of the World Zionist Organization (“WZO”) met in Beersheva, Israel at the end of October. After three days of meetings, the ZGC held a plenary session and voted on various resolutions facing World Zionism. The progressive forces won several votes, including a first of its kind resolution regarding the LGBT+ community. Overall, however, the ZGC remained very split, particularly regarding issues related to Israel’s occupation of the West Bank.

The ZGC meets annually between World Zionist Congresses and is comprised of approximately 120 Zionist leaders from around the world. The ZGC sets policy and provides directions to the WZO. The last World Zionist Congress in 2015 determined the makeup of the current ZGC. For every five delegates that a party won to the last Congress, it gets one delegate to the ZGC. Approximately one third of the delegates come from Israel, one third from the United States, and the remaining third from the rest of the world. The Israeli delegation was determined by the Israeli election immediately prior to the last Congress, while the American delegation was determined by a public election open to all Jews living in the United States over 18 years of age. Approximately 57,000 people voted in the last U.S. election.

The World Union of Meretz introduced a resolution calling on the WZO to create a new unit to promote Zionist activities for members of the LGBT community throughout the world because the WZO has ignored this important community in the past. The Education Committee of the ZGC initially defeated the resolution, but Meretz brought it to the floor through a procedural maneuver. Once on the floor, the resolution again faced strong resistance from right wing forces but Meretz, joined by most other progressives, ultimately prevailed, passing the resolution by a vote of 57 to 53.

The ZGC also passed a resolution reinforcing the WZO’s commitment to the fundamental values of equality set forth in Israel’s Declaration of Independence by a simple voice vote. In line with the values set forth in the Declaration of Independence, the ZGC also approved a resolution requiring the WZO to “act, initiate and fund projects to promote education for all towards tolerance and equality within the Zionist-Jewish informal and formal education systems in Israel and the Diaspora.” Equally important, in light of the overwhelming support for the values of equality set forth in the Declaration of Independence, the right wing factions withdrew their resolution praising the racist “Nation-State Law,” passed by the Knesset in 2018.

For the first time, the ZGC passed a resolution pushed by Meretz requiring that the WZO’s Settlement Division to present a detailed summary of its program to the ZGC, and to

make similar reports every six months. The Settlement Division has traditionally worked in secrecy and has been used by the Israeli government to funnel large sums of money to build and expand settlements in the West Bank without any oversight by the WZO. This critical

ZGC resolution should provide transparency for the first time regarding the nature and extent of the WZO and the Israeli Government’s settlement activities in the West Bank. Meretz also convinced the Likud to withdraw a resolution praising Donald Trump.

The news from the ZGC was not all good, however, as the right wing passed – by small margins – several resolutions that will impede opposition to Israel’s occupation of the territories. First, by a thin margin of 47 to 43 with 2 abstentions, a resolution passed that called for excluding from the Zionist Movement any group or person who provides support “directly or indirectly for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)



Report from the October 2019 Zionist General Council

efforts, either directly or indirectly, and either ‘full’ or ‘partial’ BDS.” While Meretz fully opposes the BDS movement, this overly broad and vague resolution is meant to shut down all opposition to the occupation and the settlements within the Zionist community, even if that opposition comes from Israeli Jews and their supporters in the Diaspora. The ZGC also passed by 63 to 49 a resolution requiring the WZO to use the words “Judea and Samaria” in their statements, publications and maps, rather than “West Bank.” Finally, the ZGC passed by 53 to 42 with six abstentions a resolution calling for the Israeli Government “to apply Israeli sovereignty to the Jordan Valley, and also to act to promote settlement in these areas.”

Throughout the ZGC, Meretz partnered with members of the progressive faction, including Ameinu/Labor, the Reform Movement and the Conservative Movement. While Meretz partnered with Ameinu and the Reform Movement at the last Congress, the 2019 ZGC represented the first time the Conservative Movement joined the progressive faction. With the addition of the Conservatives, it now controls almost half the votes at the ZGC.

Going into the 2020 Congress, the Conservative Movement’s caucusing with the progressive forces will be particularly important in light of the near collapse of the Israeli Labor Party over the past five years. The outcome of 2020 World Zionist Congress vote in United States, will likely determine whether the WZO will be a positive force supporting a two state solution, or a negative force promoting annexation of territories and apartheid. ■

David Dormont grew up in Hashomer Hatzair and is the past Treasurer of Partners for Progressive Israel and the former Vice President of American ORT. He serves as the political chair of J Street in Philadelphia and is a current member of the World Zionist Organization’s General Counsel.



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OUR PLATFORM

We are inspired by Israel's Declaration of Independence –which proclaimed the State “will be based on the precepts of liberty, justice and peace as taught by the Prophets; and will uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of race, creed, or sex; and will guarantee full freedom of conscience worship, education and culture.”

Our commitment is to democracy and the rule of law, believing that all citizens of the State of Israel must be treated equally, and their civil and human rights protected. We oppose policies of discrimination, fear, and tribalism.

We fiercely oppose the current policy of permanent occupation and annexation. It is unjust and will end Israel's democracy. The occupation is sustained by ongoing policies of repression that only serve to exacerbate conflict and require daily violence to maintain it.

We proudly stand with those Israelis searching for peace with Palestine. Their understanding, broadly shared at the highest levels of Israel's security services, that the current policies ultimately harm Israel's security, needs to be supported publicly and energetically so that a meaningful peace process can gain the popular support necessary to nurture and develop it.

Peace-seeking Israelis and Palestinians urgently need the encouragement and assistance of the Zionist movement to support their programs of dialogue, combined with political action to achieve our shared vision of a negotiated, mutually accepted two-state solution in which Israelis and Palestinians can live in peace and mutual security. This will also enable full and open peace with the Arab world and end Israel's growing pariah status.

We wholeheartedly support religious and cultural pluralism in Israeli society. For the State of Israel to be a primary engine for Jewish creative continuity, it must empower, not oppose, the wide range of Jewish cultural and religious expression.

We stand with Israelis demanding the protection of the rights of women, including equal pay for equal work, equal opportunity in politics, an end to enforced segregation, and an end to discrimination against women's full participation in public events, both military and civilian.

We stand with Israelis fighting against vigilante “modesty patrols” and other acts of harassment against women.

We stand with Israelis that welcome asylum seekers, treat foreign workers with the dignity that they deserve, and fight against racism in their society, be it against Jews of color or people of other faiths.

We stand with Israelis striving to ensure full legal and social equality for the LGBTQ community, including marriage rights.

We also stand with Israelis working to promote environmental sustainability and support working with Palestinians and neighboring countries to deal with regional threats to climate and to water resources.

Within our communities in North America, we also have much work to do. Against the challenge of anti-Semitism and white supremacist movements, we will work with communal partners, especially Muslim organizations, to promote a common defense to our shared safety and values through interfaith and intercommunal dialogue.

We are aligned with the values and policies of the Israeli Labor Party, Meretz, the Green Movement, and other like-minded Israeli movements, organizations, and activists. Together, we work to ensure that the Israel we leave to future generations reflects the best of the values, traditions and hopes we inherited from previous generations, while moving past endless conflict and toward a brighter future of peace.



THE 38th WORLD ZIONIST CONGRESS- VOTE FOR HOPE - VOTE HATIKVAH!

Why should I vote?

- Because your voice matters
- Because the progressive American Jewish voice matters
- Because the World Zionist Congress elections are your opportunity to make that voice heard in Israel

The World Zionist Congress elections directly impact the flow of **\$1,000,000,000** in budget annually. That billion dollars impacts every aspect of Israeli society and global Jewish life. Whether you are talking about the Occupation, religious pluralism, gender equity, LGBTQ equality or economic justice.

What is the World Zionist Congress?

For 123 years, the World Zionist Congress has been the democratic assembly of the Jewish people where every Jew in the world can have a voice in the most important issues confronting the Jewish state. The Congress makes funding and policy decisions for the World Zionist Organization, and its makeup helps determine the leadership of the Jewish Agency for Israel, The Jewish National Fund, and the United Israel Appeal.

Who is Hatikvah?

The Hatikvah slate is comprised of leaders representing a broad range of organizations, including ALPEH, Ameinu, Americans for Peace Now, Habonim Dror North America, Hashomer Hatzair, J Street, Jewish Labor Committee, National Council of Jewish Women, New Israel Fund, Partners for Progressive Israel and T'ruah, along with Rabbis, activists, academics, artists and others who have joined together to best represent you and your vision for a progressive Israel and world Jewry.

What has Hatikvah accomplished?

At prior World Zionist Congress, Hatikvah representatives have chaired the Resolutions Committee on Settlements and in doing so led a successful campaign to pass a resolution endorsing a two state solution and disallowing funding over the Green Line. This happened in spite of the violent objections of right-wing extremists from other slates. Hatikvah candidates have become leaders in the WZO and Jewish Agency Executive Committees on the strength of Hatikvah's delegation to the Congress, and those leaders are pivotal in maintaining financial support for youth movement shlichim, diverse religious streams, and other progressive priorities.

How do I vote?

Any self-identified Jewish person, who is or will be at least 18 years of age on June 30, 2020, lives in the United States, and will not vote in the March 2, 2020 Knesset election, can vote in the American Zionist election for delegates to the 38th World Zionist Congress. You can cast your vote online starting January 21st, 2020 (until March 11th) at: www.zionistelection.org.



Ir Amim: Preserving Jerusalem as the Present Home and Future Capital of Two Peoples

By Rachel Schwartz and Amy Cohen



Photo: *Ir Amim*

WHO WE ARE

Founded in 2004, *Ir Amim* (“city of nations” or “city of peoples”) is the longest-standing Israeli NGO which focuses exclusively on Jerusalem within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Our mission is twofold: To make Jerusalem a more equitable and sustainable city for the Israelis and Palestinians for whom it is home and to help secure a negotiated resolution for the city. *Ir Amim* seeks a sustainable political future in which Jerusalem is the shared capital of two sovereign states, Israel and Palestine – achievable only through a negotiated Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

A city holy to three religions, Jerusalem is the shared home – and we believe, future capital – of Israelis and Palestinians alike. As such, *Ir Amim* envisions a Jerusalem that ensures the dignity and welfare of all its residents and safeguards their holy places and historical and cultural heritages.

WHAT WE DO AT IR AMIM

In pursuit of a more just and equal Jerusalem, we focus on a variety of flashpoints that both undermine this shared reality as

well as erode conditions for an agreed resolution regarding the city’s future. These include, but are not limited to:

- Severe discrimination in building and planning, leading to staggering numbers of demolitions of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem and contributing to overall Palestinian displacement from the city.
- State-backed, settler-initiated evictions of Palestinians in favor of ideological Israeli settler organizations that establish strongholds in the heart of Palestinian neighborhoods.
- Exploitation of tourism, national parks, and archeology as a mechanism to expand and bolster Israeli settlement.
- Socio-economic disparities between East and West Jerusalem in the form of unequal distribution of municipal services and budget allocations, which lead to failing educational institutions, inadequate infrastructure, and systemic neglect of Palestinian neighborhoods.
- Continued settlement expansion over the Green Line in East Jerusalem, jeopardizing the viability of a two-state solution based on two capitals in the city.

These challenges to equality and justice not only contribute to the fracturing and erosion of the Palestinian space in Jerusalem, but enable the further consolidation of Israeli control over the entire city, foiling prospects for any forthcoming peace agreement.

Ir Amim tackles these issues through a variety of tools: political, legal, and public advocacy; policy work and research; public education and outreach; as well as sustained monitoring, reporting, and expert analysis of the latest political trends in Jerusalem.

Our unwavering commitment to comprehensive research and to the accuracy of our analysis of developments on the ground has gained us a solid reputation among policymakers, the media, and the general public, both locally and internationally.

This past year, some 7,000 people participated in our study tours of East Jerusalem, exposing them to the political reality on the ground and raising awareness as to the pressing issues facing the city. Since Ir Amim's inception, an estimated 40,000 participants, primarily Israelis, have taken part in these tours.

As part of our robust public education and outreach efforts, a large portion of our work is dedicated to organizing within Israeli and Palestinian civil society, as well as mobilizing the Israeli public and reorienting public discourse on Jerusalem through educational programs, tours, public events, and briefings.

Below are a few highlights from our work this past year with our Israeli and Palestinian counterparts towards preserving Jerusalem as the present home and future capital of two peoples.

IR AMIM IN ACTION



Photo: Ir Amim

Standing Together Against Police Brutality in East Jerusalem

Issawiya is an East Jerusalem neighborhood, adjacent to the Mount Scopus Hebrew University campus and home to approximately 20,000 Palestinian residents. Since June 2019,

this neighborhood has been the target of an aggressive police campaign marked by daily hostile raids, harassment, and sweeping arbitrary arrests. Over the past seven months, over 600 residents – including hundreds of children – have been detained, with less than 30, according to estimates, actually being charged with any wrongdoing.

While the situation in Issawiya remains dire, it has presented a unique opportunity for partnership with local community residents and activists. Ir Amim, along with other Israeli partners, has been on the ground working hand-in-hand with Issawiya residents to bring an end to the ongoing intrusive police campaign through appeals to the Israeli authorities, petitions and demonstrations, documentation of cases of police brutality, and public advocacy through media coverage and informative events.

We made headway just prior to the start of the current school year when the local parents' committee announced a school strike due to the unsafe environment created by the constant armed police presence on neighborhood streets. As a result of Ir Amim's advocacy, 40 school principals from both West and East Jerusalem sent a letter to Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Leon, urging him to intervene, followed by an appeal by the Jerusalem municipal education department. It was only after these interventions that the Mayor finally agreed to meet with residents, ultimately leading to an understanding with the police to limit their presence, particularly during the children's commutes to and from school. Thanks to this agreement, the neighborhood schools were able to open for the new school year.

Unfortunately, the police did not uphold their end of the bargain and resumed operations in the neighborhood. But Ir Amim will remain active in Issawiya alongside local residents until the situation is completely de-escalated and calm is restored to the neighborhood.

Safeguarding the Multi-Religious Character of Jerusalem's Old City

Each year, to mark Jerusalem Day – a day commemorating Israel's "reunification" of the city in 1967 – a coalition of right-wing organizations organizes the Jerusalem Day Flag Parade.

The parade attracts thousands of Israeli nationalist participants who march through Jerusalem to the Western Wall via the Old City's Muslim Quarter, provocatively brandishing Israeli flags. Some participants engage in anti-Palestinian incitement and violence. Israeli police cordon off the Muslim Quarter for hours as the parade passes through, forcing most shops to close and prompting the majority of residents to shutter themselves inside

their homes until the march ends.

Last year, Jerusalem Day coincided with the final days of Ramadan – a period of time for Muslims similar in its holiness to the 10 days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, with hundreds of thousands of worshippers attending prayers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Understanding the sensitivity of this timing, Ir Amim launched a wide-scale outreach campaign to exert pressure on the Israeli authorities by enlisting the Israeli public in a call to reroute the parade and keep it out of the Muslim Quarter.

Major public figures, religious leaders, and City Council members joined Ir Amim in demanding that the parade's route bypass the Muslim Quarter out of respect for the city's Muslim residents and their holy days.

As part of the campaign, Ir Amim was active in both traditional media and social media, and this helped increase public opposition to the parade among Jerusalem residents and religious Jewish communities in Israel. Over 1,000 people signed a public petition addressed to Jerusalem's Mayor and nearly 100 community and religious leaders signed a joint letter to parade organizers, calling on them to alter the march's route.

In addition, businesses throughout West Jerusalem hung signs in solidarity with shopkeepers in the Muslim Quarter, who were unable to open their shops due to the parade and whose businesses are occasionally vandalized by parade participants.

Along with these gains, Ir Amim's sustained advocacy over the years has led to heightened criticism of the parade and the growth of alternative Jerusalem Day events, which highlight the binational and multicultural character of the city and the shared life within.

While we are making inroads in putting this issue front and center and activating voices to join our efforts, there is still more work to be done in achieving our ultimate goal – having the parade permanently rerouted away from the Muslim Quarter, out of respect for its residents.

Engaging the Ultra-Orthodox Community in Jerusalem

Building on our work with West Jerusalem civil society groups, this past year Ir Amim expanded its outreach and education to focus on mobilizing young ultra-orthodox (Haredi) leaders in Jerusalem to more effectively engage their own community in discussions concerning the political situation in the city.

Although representing over one-third of the city's Jewish population and possessing great social and political influence,

Jerusalem's Haredi population has been largely unexposed to a more nuanced and informed discourse on the complexities of the conflict in Jerusalem and has been relatively absent from peacebuilding efforts there.

Through a specially designed program of workshops, seminars, study tours, and meetings with Palestinians from East Jerusalem, we have begun building a cohort of Haredi social activists – both women and men – and equipping them with the knowledge, tools, and connections they need to promote a peace-oriented discourse within their own community.

As a result of our work, we have begun to see the Haredi media touch upon these issues, and are witnessing the growth of networking among likeminded Haredi community activists who can work together on the interests shared by both the Haredi and Palestinian communities (e.g., education, planning and building, housing rights, economic development).

Just this past year, over 100 individuals from the ultra-orthodox community in Jerusalem attended our programs.

There are many challenges ahead as we pursue our vision of a more just and equal Jerusalem. These are just a few examples of the important work Ir Amim is doing as we continue to aspire towards an agreed political future for our shared city.

To learn more about our work, please visit our [website](#), Facebook page ([@IrAmimEng](#)), and Twitter account ([@IrAmimAlerts](#)).



Rachel Schwartz is the Social Media Coordinator - English for Ir Amim.



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Can Progressive Americans Contribute to a Revival of the Israeli Left?



The following is an edited transcript of a discussion in our “Conversations with Israel and Palestine” series of webinars, and took place on Dec. 18, 2019. It is a very rich discussion by three people deeply knowledgeable about and committed to the Israeli moderate left – and who speak frankly about what they think is needed. While it took place before the recent electoral alliance concluded between Meretz and Labor, many of the same concerns that American Jewish progressives have about that alliance surface here as well. It is worth reading and pondering by anyone concerned with the parlous state of the Israeli left.

David Myers: Hello My name is David Myers. I’m a professor of Jewish history at UCLA in Los Angeles. I’m also the board president of the New Israel Fund. I’m delighted to welcome you all to this latest installment of “Conversations with Israel and Palestine,” hosted by Partners for Progressive Israel. I’ll be moderating a conversation with two prominent Israeli activists, Yael Patir and Uri Zaki.

Yael Patir is the Israel director for J Street, which she joined in 2012, after six years at the Shimon Peres Center for Peace. Yael also helped establish the Palestinian-Israeli peace NGO forum which is a network of some 100 Palestinian and Israeli peace and dialogue organizations. She is a certified mediator and a group facilitator specializing in dialogue between groups in conflict.

Now Uri Zaki, who has focused his career on promoting peace and democratic values. He was a senior advisor to former Justice Minister Yossi Beilin, and was part of the negotiating team of the Geneva Initiative. Uri was the founding director of B’Tselem USA and later director of Zionist enterprises at the World Zionist Organization. He is a leading figure in the Meretz party where he held the position of President of the governing Assembly. Today, Uri leads the front for the protection of democracy which acts as an assertive attack dog against the Israel alt-right.

Let’s set the stage for the conversation. Later today, the United States House of Representatives will vote on two articles of impeachment against Donald Trump. Trump and his allies represent, in the eyes of many of us on this call, the United States version of the global scourge of illiberal democracy. A

political ideology and practice that rests on an ethnocentric, xenophobic form of nationalism based on exclusion rather than inclusion, intolerance rather than tolerance, and power rather than justice.

Israel, as we know, is a link in this chain of global illiberalism. The last decade, which I often think of simply as the Netanyahu decade, has drawn aptly from this playbook of illiberal democracy. Attacks on the rule of law, on an independent judiciary on the free press, on political opponents, on the rights of minorities, on the rights of the most vulnerable like asylum seekers.

It's important to note that pushing in this direction towards the Israeli version of illiberalism has been a motley assembly of right-wing American Jewish, and for that matter, Christian actors. They have infused huge amounts of money in the direction of the settlement project and have, in that regard, really perpetuated and dug deeper roots for the occupation.

They have supported organizations intent on attacking institutions of democracy in Israel as well as progressive social justice actors. That's something that we at NIF and J Street know very well. A central figure of course in that particular aspect of right-wing support is Sheldon Adelson who has bankrolled, among many other things, Israel's most widely disseminated newspaper Israel Hayom (Israel Today) which I think of as Israel's version of Pravda.

Right-wing actors from America have also played a key role in generating, disseminating, lobbying for, and legislating ideas that support the ethnocentric vision. The classic example is Israel's nation's-state law, passed by the Knesset in July 2018, which was the product of a concerted and, I have to say, enviably successful decade of work by right-wing think tanks funded by American Jewish philanthropists.

If there is a global network of illiberal democrats, there's also a global network of progressive liberal democrats. We may be at present less organized or less well-funded, but we exist and in considerable numbers.

We must now marshal our resources and fortify our collaborations. In this regard, it seems to me that the divide that is emerging, or that has emerged, is not so much between Israel and America as, for example, Daniel Gordis has recently argued. Rather, it's between liberals and illiberals, both of whom are found in substantial numbers in Israel, in the United

States, and in many places around the world.

This brings me now to our two distinguished panelists, Yael and Uri, who can help us understand what they think needs to be done in this challenging era. Challenging indeed, but we begin to see, at least in the Israeli case, some glimmer of hope, or at least some glimmer of change on the horizon.

I'll open by asking Yael and then Uri, where are we today? Donald Trump faces imminent impeachment and then likely subsequent acquittal in the United States. Boris Johnson won a smashing victory in the United Kingdom. These two developments push in the direction of that further movement toward the illiberal side of the spectrum. Now Israel goes to a third set of elections in which Netanyahu seems to be hanging on by a thread.

I'm curious to hear your thoughts about where we are in this global moment of illiberalism, of xenophobia, of ethnocentrism, and more particularly, where Israel is within that wider settings. We'll begin with Yael. Welcome and thank you for agreeing to be with us.

Yael Patir: Thank you. Let me first start by thanking the organizers for putting this call together and for giving me the honor of sharing the conversation with David and Uri who I very much appreciate and learn from. The good news from Israel is that we are definitely at the end of the Netanyahu era. While it's not clear how the clock is exactly going to run and how much time we do have, it is clear that the Netanyahu decade, as David described, is coming to an end.

That does not mean that illiberalism in Israel is coming to an end. That will be a political consequence and has to do a lot with how politics will unfold. I think one of the things that we are seeing with much disgust is the way in which the Likud Party is behaving. We're seeing the same kind of developments happening within the Republican Party. There is this tendency to form one cohesive front, which usually people on the right are much better at doing than we on the left, uniting behind the leader.

The question is whether the end of Netanyahu will also mean the end of these trends that have penetrated throughout institutions and have been legitimized. I do see a lot of hope and I see the pendulum shifting.

Uri Zaki: Yes, we are in an era that somehow in Israel

started earlier than the rest of the world. Netanyahu has gotten gradually worse in the way he acts as a populist leader. At the beginning of his tenure he had some respect for the rule of law, democracy, and such, but since he got into power, he has had this divisive manner to him. Since 2015, when he won the election against all odds, he got rid of his old establishment direction and went into a truly populist, divisive mode, attacking the infrastructure of democracy.

That came with a hubris that is at the core of the indictments against him. Most of these things he's charged with happened either very close to or just after his victory in 2015, which for him was a signal that he can do whatever he wants. He's famous as King Bibi on the cover of *Time Magazine*. He's felt like he has no restraints; he can do whatever he wants.

That was also a time when in the rest of the world, not long after Trump won in the United States, you saw an unleashing of the legitimacy of this authoritarianism. The effect of Trump's election was enormous. You can't compare the world and those populist leaders before and after Trump was elected because it affects everything. It affects what you're allowed and not allowed to say on social media, what is acceptable language, how you treat your rivals: making them enemies, that's how you treat your rivals and this whole notion of the deep state, which has penetrated so deeply into the discourse.

Bibi is in close contact with Trump and with the Trump infrastructure, whether it is the fake news media or the moguls who financed both Trump and Netanyahu. Of course, also evangelical Christians. It's also keeping in very close touch with Orban from Hungary, with Modi from India, and the others.

All of them are connected with Putin, who is, at the end of the day, the source of all these developments because he proved that you can win autocratic power in a democracy. I think he's the inspiration for many of these other leaders.

David: Okay. Thank you, Uri. I want to take up the question of what the progressive camp looks like, what state it's in Israel, and where you think it's headed. What do you see in the intermediate-term? I agree with Yael that we're at the end of the Netanyahu era and one can see that sense of desperation.

One of the possible benefits of the immediate aftermath is that it will bring a helpful measure of instability to the system because Netanyahu brought, over the course of the decade,

tremendous stability in terms of his personal stranglehold over institutions of government.

I'm wondering what you anticipate, assuming Netanyahu will be gone and that a coalition or unity government of some sort may take power?

Yael: My honest answer is that I really don't know. My analysis has to do a lot with the narratives I see and whether I choose to be more fearful about things or more hopeful.

I look at the way in which the settlement movement has managed to penetrate the main venues of power in the media, in the army, in the public sector, and to advance its ideology and its interests. It's a very narrow interest and then indeed it is scary. I can also look at the more hopeful reality because our public sector, unlike in the US, is not political. We have people in very senior positions and it has nothing to do with their political affiliation or with their ideology, and we see it in our security establishment and with many different organizations, and we see it in the ministries.

I think that once Netanyahu is out, people will breathe again. There is the sense of suffocation, of self-censorship, that if I am a proud lefty, nobody can not know that about me, and I would not consider trying to get a job in the public sector because I know that nobody will take me because of my views. I don't know if it's true if it's not true, but it's my psyche. The sense of being silenced, of not being able to express yourself, of being afraid of being exposed as a lefty in your workplace; that will absolutely be erased very quickly with a different leadership. Even with a unity government in Israel, just without having that Haman as a leader.

I think that Bibi's removal from public stage will have a very great impact by itself, and the idea that our democracy and its institutions are stronger than the individual will send a very strong message.

At the same time, the systems are already in a way rigged. It's hard for me to give a scenario with full confidence, but I know that the important thing is not what we predict but what we do about it. One of the things we've realized is that we lack people in public sector. There are now programs to train people and to push them to take these positions. That's just one example of the actions that we're seeing.

Also, I think our political system currently is not organized in

a way that is representative of where the people are. Because of Netanyahu, we are going to elections again and again and the elections are about whether or not we impeach Netanyahu. People, for example, who are Meretz voters, will vote for the alternative to Netanyahu because it's more important to them to get rid of him than to have a party that represents their ideology. The struggle against him is dominating everything. Israel has a very strong center which is represented by the Blue-White Party, but we will also have major changes regarding how our left is organized.



David: Thank you. Uri, I want us to move directly to the heart of our matter, which is what we can do and what the state of play is with the progressive liberal left organizations in Israel which seem, at some level, to be absolutely decimated. We often labor under the belief that there's no substantial progressive voice. If we look around the world, we see worrisome signs as well.

What do you see in Israel in terms of the current state of affairs and also what needs to happen in order to effect the kind of change Yael was intimating in her response?

Uri: There is a very developed, very impressive progressive infrastructure in Israel. It's a source of envy in a sense. We have organizations that, despite the ongoing occupation and the security threats, that have been able to build a chain of organizations focusing on human rights, on civil rights, on rights of minorities. All this impressive infrastructure was supported throughout those years by the NIF. I'll also mention NIF itself, was caught by surprise by the brutal attacks it suddenly faced.

All of a sudden, you saw Naomi Chazan and the NIF itself flogged as traitors. We're talking about a concentrated and organized effort to break the resources of the progressive network in Israel. The two main attacks were against the NIF and against the European countries that supported the Israeli

civil society organizations. They knew that by attacking NIF and the European governments' aid to Israeli civil society organizations, they could really weaken this progressive infrastructure, dry up the resources, their ability to function. By the way, they were more successful with the European governments, I think, and less successful with the NIF because the NIF started understanding what we progressives need to do. For many of us, those organizations established in the '70s, '80s, and '90s, aren't equipped to fight this fight.

We're talking about a fight that from our side is heavily funded, that has facts and truth, much like you know from the Trump era now. Now people understand because they know about fake news and fake truth culture. You are being attacked by smart people who are able to use very eloquent, very vicious populist statements and attacks, and you need to defend yourselves.

The way to do it, the way that I adopted is to fight back and attack them across the line. You need to be on the attack constantly because, first of all, once you attack them they have to pull the resources from attacking you into defending themselves, much like we've been doing in the last decade. Second, there is a lot of material to attack them with.

These are organizations that have dark money behind them. They attacked us on the so-called foreign funding, but they don't say who's funding them. The reason is because they have many things to hide. Unveiling those interests that stand behind their resources is an important way to shame them.

That won't go away after Netanyahu. Some may be silenced, but there's an infrastructure that is very strong, well-funded, and that is not going anywhere.

At the Forum for Protection of Democracy we're showing how the American right is trying to implant American rightwing theories that are not part of the Israeli discourse at all into the discourse in Israel. For example, the right to bear arms and abortion, which aren't part of our discourse here. Of course, they have also libertarian concepts that are foreign; Begin was not a libertarian! The Israeli right was not socially liberal, but never libertarian.

David: Okay. An important way in which Uri understands the needs of the day is through his particular "attack dog" model, opposition research, and hitting back at the other side. I'm wondering how you see both the lay of the land in terms of the progressive world in Israel; what's the state of affairs and what do you think is important to build?

Here, I want to draw on an issue you haven't yet spoken about, but that seems to me the operational credo of progressive Israel for the next half-century, the idea of an Arab-Jewish partnership. I'm wondering what alignment of progressive organizations can lead to the implementation of an alternative vision to the one reflected in the nation-state law?

Yael: I'll highlight a few things, there are probably many more. One of them was what I was referring to when I said that our political system, or our political parties, do not reflect necessarily our progressive views surrounding this idea of a Jewish-Arab progressive partnership. One of its expressions would be a party. I say this with hesitation because I think that both Meretz and Hadash look at themselves as parties that have that partnership at heart in a way. At least that's what they would like to represent themselves as, but neither is really a party formed to promote this idea that there is a camp of left people in Israel that is both Jewish and Arab.

More important than having a political party is to have partnerships and to have the possibility of progressive Zionists and the Arab minority working together, because there's no way to see an Israel center-left government without opening up this space and legitimizing this sort of partnership.

It can happen in many spheres, not only between politicians but also in civil society and education. This is one of my greatest sources of optimism because I think what we've seen in the last few months in Israel has been incredible, in terms of the reaction to Netanyahu. The way in which the Joint List, and mainly Ayman Odeh, reacted in the last two cycles has brought people to really discuss this idea.

The nation-state law is also part of it, it has been brought to the center of public debate; something that we didn't talk about for a while which is: how do we live together here? What are the boundaries of what we want to accept, how equal we are, how liberal we are, how democratic we really are. You hear in coffee shop conversations people saying, "Why shouldn't we have Arab ministers in our government?" People who aren't political animals but start to ask, "Why are Arabs a problem? Why can't they have equal status in our institutions?" There are more polls being conducted on it. I think the figures that we see both from the Arab minority in Israel as well as from the Jewish majority are quite surprising.

There's still a lot of bad things that I can highlight in terms of people's willingness to accept the Palestinian minority in Israel

as equal partners in running the country. We're not there at all, but the discourse is years ahead of where it was just a few months ago. We have a blooming civil society; it's amazing!

We have wonderful organizations dealing with human rights and with other issues but we've neglected the politics. Also, as a generation, I'm saying this being critical of ourselves. We go to work in NGOs, we fight in legal ways, we fight in advocacy but we're not pushing the politicians enough. I see this in J Street. I see the way organizing is happening around the political sphere.

It's not happening enough but I think there's a realization that the political sphere has been neglected and there's more organizations that are thinking in advocacy terms, are thinking in mobilizing political power, of how to gain political power, and how to influence power, which is very different than how to win a case in court or how to fight against the daily abuses of the occupation. That also has to do with training people into being either politicians or taking positions of political responsibility.

David: It seems also important to think of the pikudim, the civil service sector, as an important site in which to implement an alternative vision given what you said, how it would be unimaginable today that you would be a candidate for a senior professional position in a ministry. The electoral sphere as well as the professional functionary class.

Yael: The other thing I will say is the importance of building an international infrastructure. Particularly from where I stand, the Israeli-American one, because the infrastructure on the right is so powerful and it's so organic and the echo chambers are amazing. I see the reactions that are coming from members of Congress in the US and from members of Knesset in Israel on the right and they're using the same arguments, they're using the same language.

I saw it just recently on our side with the decision of the High Court in the EU to label settlement products and they used the same arguments. I was asking myself, "How come? Who is sending them talking points about Tibet and Crimea and Western Sahara?" There is now this natural connection and relationship that was built through years of engagement and trust-building. That's really something that we need to invest much more both to counter them and to be more effective in what we do.

David: Great, okay, we'll go to something else. We're now going turn, in the last 15 minutes of our conversation, to some of the questions that have come up. I want to return to a point that both you made, Uri and Yael and combine it with David Abraham's question. What tangible change can we expect in March, especially with regard to Arab participation in the vote?

We saw between April and September a very significant rise in Arab voter participation from 48-49% to 60%, which is still far below the high of 75% in 1999. This was something which NIF grantees Zazim and Omdim B'yachad were working on assiduously and there were tangible, meaningful results. What's a reasonable expectation in terms of increased Arab participation for the March vote and how might that alter the outcome? How do you see it?

Uri: I think we should expect another rise in Arab participation and turnout. I think Netanyahu was the best campaigner for Arab participation for the joint list.

Ayman Odeh and Ahmad Tibi and others played their cards very well in the last round between September and the dissolution of the Knesset showed that they are pragmatic and willing to participate., Blue-White has different factions within it but Benny Gantz should get good, if not excellent, marks on the way he acted as well.

Unlike April where he totally ignored, sometimes dismissed, and almost incited against the Arab voters and their representatives, this time he was very respectful. He mentioned them in all of the speeches he made, he met with them and took pictures with them.

In that sense, it was the well-played game of Odeh, and Tibi and the rest of the Joint List and also the understanding of Gantz. That was a flow of events. I do think that in April 2019, Meretz got many Arab votes, because we had a glimpse of what could be the future. Meretz in April was very different than Meretz in September, a few months later. Meretz in April had a very left-leaning list with two Arabs out of the first five. That's for the first time in Israel's history where you have almost a balanced representation of Jews and Arabs; Arabs reacted and 40,000 voted for Meretz.

When Meretz pulled away from that, lowering the list position of Issawi Frej and also joining forces with Barak, who has a dreadful record with the Arabs, it lost some 60% of the votes it got in April. Right now as a Meretz activist I can say

I hope we're on the eve of changing the way we're going to be presented to the public, I think it would be somewhere in between April and September. It won't be as good as in April but it won't be as bad as in September. I totally agree that the future is for progressive Jewish-Arab cooperation.

By the way, if you take the Arab Joint List, some elements there are conservative. If they would have been Jews they would have been part of Shas, part of Likud, and even maybe part of the extreme right. There is a division within the Arab society, but because of the assault on them they unite, and I think that's what they should do, but in a more healthy future progressives should form together a big left-wing party that will be Jewish-Arab.

David: What do you see in March 2020? There is tangible progress. Is it conceivable that the Joint List will support a government and be an important player in the aftermath of the March election?

Yael: I wish.

David: Are we still far away from that?

Yael: Yes. I think we're still far away from that.

David: Okay, Yael, I want to give you an opportunity to ask the question directed to you from Michael Farrow. Would you care to make a response to the recent Intercept article criticizing J Street's effectiveness and influence? It includes the claim that you advised against conditioning military aid because it might diminish J Street's influence on the Knesset.

Yael: Thanks for the opportunity. It's a very long article. One of the things that was highlighted was this dynamic. I will say that we have, in J Street, discussions on issues and one of my jobs as the Israel Director is to represent the position of who are our partners in Israel with regard to the positions that we take. How much we are in line, how much we are out of line, how it will affect our ability to not to influence the Knesset? I think that's the thing that was, for me, the most annoying about that representation in The Intercept. J Street does not influence the Knesset. J Street seeks support from Israelis.

One of the greatest things we did when we supported the Iran Agreement was bring Israeli security ex-officials to support the deal and it was extremely helpful in getting the deal through and something that I'm very proud of doing despite the fact that the deal did not get support across the Israeli political spectrum.

I think we had to not only discuss the issue of aid because it's on the table, but also to have a position. The current position of J Street is that we call for transparency and we want to make sure the security aid benefits Israeli's security and not Israel's occupation. That's a position I feel very comfortable with.

David: Okay, so we have time for one final question from Tyler Grassi. I want to preface it by saying that we at NIF often imagine that we're confronting in the current moment two major crises. One is the crisis of democracy in Israel, which we've talked a lot about. The other is the crisis of a prospective lost generation of young American Jews in particular who feel increasingly detached and alienated from the Jewish community, the established Jewish community, and from Israel.

The question that Tyler asks is "What is the most practical way for Progressive American Jews to be involved? To let Israelis know that we're standing behind them." I would say, not only what is the most effective way that American progressives, Jewish and non-Jewish, can manifest their support for Israel, but what potential is there for that support to double back and have a reinvigorating effect on progressives, particularly, progressive Jews in America?

Uri: I would advise first and foremost to be active in both these wings of how to promote policies through J Street and how to promote the actual work that Israeli nonprofits operate in Israel through the NIF. I think that's the best way to do it.

Second, it's not about the specific individual, but rather, if you take a lesson from what's going on with the American right and understand that it is using Israel as a kind of testing ground for many of its notions. Progressives should also use Israel as a testing ground on how you counter them. It's not like any other foreign country to any progressive American, by the way, not only for Jews, because there's no equivalent to the kind of cooperation between the American right and the Israeli right.

David: Thank you. Yael, the final word. Small question. What can American Progressives, American progressive Jews do?

Yael: I think that things are changing. There is now much more reciprocity and an opportunity because we have a shared struggle. It's not only about Israel and occupation. It's also about what is happening in the US and it's also about the global rise of liberal democracies or liberal leaders.

Second, building trust between us. Not a competition on who's progressive and who's not. There shouldn't be conditions for what is considered progressive and what is not, which I often think happens in this relationship. Again, we should do our best to be able to form a line.

Then there are very practical ways of echoing each other, of providing support, providing accountability for positions that are taken in each of the sides. Better echo chambers to do that, opportunities to meet, sharing experiences, sharing lessons learned, sharing the tools, legitimizing each other's positions, as I said, and really encouraging ourselves to educate ourselves about the other. I think, in many way, Israelis have much work to do in learning about Americans.

Uri: Just one more comment that I forgot about it, and we're hosted by Partners for Progressive Israel. In 2020, there will be elections to the Zionist Congress. Another way to influence is to vote for the joint progressive HATIKVAH faction that has J Street, NIF, PPI and others. Voting for that, we can start the revolution from there. It's a great way to bring together American and Israeli progressive Jews into action.

David: Thank you. You have exemplified, really, what I think is perhaps the ultimate source of salvation which is this kind of people-to-people contact, getting young Israelis and young American progressives together to talk about issues of mutual concern. Whether it be the conflict or global warming, we will advance the cause in both countries.

Unfortunately, there's much more to be said but no time, so we're going to have to bring this conversation to an end. I want to thank Yael Patir and Uri Zaki for a really stimulating hour. Thank you to all who were viewing and listening to this Conversation with Israel-Palestine. I want to thank the staff of Partners for Progressive Israel for their work in making this discussion happen, especially Dinesh. You can go to progressiveisrael.org to learn more about Partners for Progressive Israel and its future programs. Thank you Uri, and thank you Yael. ■

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