

Partners for Progressive Israel Applauds Israeli High Court Ruling on Non-Orthodox Conversions

Partners for Progressive Israel Applauds Israeli High Court Ruling on Non-Orthodox Conversions

Partners for Progressive Israel applauds this week's historic 8-1 Israeli High Court ruling that recognizes conversions to Judaism performed by the Reform and Conservative movements in Israel. Israel's Declaration of Independence guaranteed "complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion" as well as "freedom of religion." The new ruling takes an important step toward protecting non-Orthodox Israelis from those who would deny them this equality and freedom.

Since Israel's founding, the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate has wielded near-exclusive control over Jewish life-cycle events, including marriage, divorce, conversion, and burial. The High Court, as Meretz chair, MK Nitzan Horowitz, correctly noted, has now taken "an important step in dismantling [this] monopoly." As Meretz MK Tamar Zandberg stressed this week, Judaism is multichromatic, and all its many varieties must be welcome in Israel.

We do note with concern, however, that as Israel approaches its March 23 elections, Prime Minister Netanyahu's ruling Likud party and his core Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox political allies have condemned the High Court ruling and are threatening to pass legislation that would override the Court and re-impose the exclusion of non-Orthodox conversions. Such legislation would both undermine the country's judicial branch and send a message of disdain to the vast majority of Jewish Americans.