

Theodore Bikel (1924-2015) Z"L

Partners for Progressive Israel mourns the passing of Theodore Bikel, PPI's board chair for many years. The world knew him as a great performer – both as a singer and an actor. We knew him as a man of conscience who was true to his principles. We will miss his wisdom as a leader and his warmth as a friend.

After being fortunate enough to get out of his native Austria, he spent some formative years in what became Israel. His commitment to a just and secure Israel at peace with its neighbors was a lifelong involvement. Not only was he PPI's board chair, but he also led PPI in an important new policy direction, when he declared his solidarity with 150 Israeli performers who publicly pledged to boycott the new theater in the large West Bank settlement town of Ariel.

This prompted our organization to be among the first in the American-Jewish community, and the only Zionist organization, to endorse an economic boycott of West Bank settlements (even as PPI joined most American Jews in opposing the general BDS movement against Israel within the Green Line). He explained his support for the settlement boycott by Israeli performing artists in his opinion piece, "[Legitimizing an Obstacle to Peace.](#)"

Two years ago, he worked diligently in our joint effort with Rabbis for Human Rights and others– with [an online video](#) and [an op-ed article](#)– protesting Israel's mistreatment of thousands of its Bedouin citizens, whose villages in the Negev go unrecognized by the Israeli government, which repeatedly subjects them to the threat and fact of wholesale demolition and displacement.

Theo represented an alternative voice to mainstream American Jewish attitudes toward Israel. In his autobiography, he noted that "The American Jewish response to Israel is woefully monolithic. We who are so capable of intricate thought are almost boorishly insistent about viewing the complexities of Israeli society and political makeup through a one-channel, narrow prism."

Theo headed the Hatikvah Progressive Zionist Slate in the U.S. election earlier this year. But sadly, he will not join his fellow elected delegates to this October's World Zionist Congress, a body he has attended and addressed in the past.

In honor of Theodore Bikel, Partners for Progressive Israel is establishing a commemorative fund to continue his great work toward a progressive Israel.

[Click here to donate to the Theodore Bikel Peace and Justice Fund.](#)