

WORLD
UNION FOR
PROGRESSIVE
JUDAISM



האיגוד
העולמי
ליהדות
מתקדמת

9 March 2010
כ"ג אדר, תש"ע

Mr Ehud Barak
Minister of Defense

URGENT! BY FAX AND REGISTERED MAIL

Dear Sir,

Re: **Proposed Amendment to The Chief Rabbinate Law (Correction – Jurisdiction in Matters of Conversion) 5769-2009**

We, the Executive Board of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, the representative body of two million Progressive Jews around the world, call for your urgent intervention in preventing another crisis surrounding the issue of conversion, which, as in the past, would cause a terrible rift in the Jewish world.

We have learnt that the proposed amendment would, for the first time, result in the State of Israel differentiating between Jews by birth and Jews by choice. Jews by birth would be eligible to automatic citizenship under the Law of Return, however, Jews by choice, if they even visited Israel as tourists prior to their conversion, would albeit be recognized as Jews by the State of Israel under the Law of Return, but would not be allowed automatic citizenship. This situation would be intolerable and completely unacceptable. It is contrary to the spirit of the Jewish tradition, to the fundamental Jewish and Zionist values and to the ideological basis upon which the State of Israel was founded as a Jewish and Democratic State and as the homeland of the Jewish people.

This amendment would not only affect those who chose to convert to Judaism in the State of Israel, but also those who convert outside of Israel, who either studied in Israel before their conversion or even visited Israel in order to strengthen their knowledge of Judaism and the Jewish people. It would leave them with no predetermined status in Israel if they were to want to make Aliyah and thus would send a clear message that Israel is not interested in Jews by choice. The Jewish World in the Diaspora would not be prepared to tolerate such a result and the damage that this would cause in Israel-Diaspora relations would be substantial.

On the eve of the tabling of this amendment, we add our voices to the call of leaders of our

13 King David St., Jerusalem, Israel 94101 ירושלים 13, רח' דוד המלך
Tel: 02-620-3447 • Fax: 02-620-3525 • Website: www.wupj.org • E-mail: wupjis@wupj.org

633 Third Ave., New York, NY 10017-6778 • Tel: 212-452-6530 • Fax: 212-452-6585 • E-Mail: wupj@urj.org
Regional Offices: Aruba, Johannesburg, London, Melbourne, Moscow, Sao Paulo

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Movement in Israel and ask you to clearly state that your government will not support any legislation that would change the Law of Return and the Citizenship Law in such a way that it would discriminate between Jews from birth and Jews by choice, and seriously affect the rights of Jewish communities around the globe, especially those of non-Orthodox congregations. This clarification is necessary to reassure the Jewish World that the State of Israel is only intent on easing the conversion process in Israel and is not reigniting the dispute surrounding the validity of conversions performed within the framework of Progressive, Conservative and other Jewish communities.

We call upon you to prove the commitment of your government to the unity of the Jewish People and to show an appropriate response to the challenge with which we are faced regarding the conversion issue, which will bring a "blessing and not a curse" to the Jewish World.

Yours faithfully,

Steve Bauman, Chair

on behalf of the Executive Board of the World Union for Progressive Judaism

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רח' דוד המלך 13, ירושלים 94101, Jerusalem, Israel King David St., 13, Jerusalem, Israel

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