

March 12, 2014

Israel as a Jewish State

Today, the State of Israel is negotiating with Palestinian leaders to reach an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a two-state solution. Israel recognizes the Palestinian right to establish a Palestinian state, and calls upon the Palestinians to recognize Israel as the Jewish state. As Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas prepares to meet with President Obama this Monday at the White House, it is clear that Palestinian acceptance of Israel's character as a Jewish nation-state has become an essential component for resolving the conflict.

Israel is both a democracy and the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people.

- The land of Israel is the birthplace of the Jewish people and its ancestral homeland for more than 3,000 years. It is the only country in the world in which the culture, history, language, and religion is predominantly Jewish. In that sense, Israel is Jewish in the same way that Italy is Italian.
- In fact, Judaism comprises both religious and national elements. As a state, Israel does not force any individual to abide by Jewish religious law. No one is compelled to observe Jewish dietary law or is prohibited from driving a car on the Sabbath.
- Israel is a full-fledged democracy and a modern state governed by secular national institutions. Israel assures that its non-Jewish citizens (primarily Arabs) are equal before the law. Indeed, Israeli Arabs are members of the Knesset, sit on Israel's Supreme Court, and participate in many other Israeli institutions.
- When Israel's government asserts the Jewish national character of the state, it in no way intends to diminish the political and civil rights of Arab citizens.

A lasting peace depends upon Palestinian and Arab recognition of Israel's status as a Jewish state.

- Palestinians have long claimed a right of return for Palestinian refugees and their descendants to Israel, and many, since the start of the Oslo peace process, have said they seek a phased approach to negotiations with Israel.
- Under such an approach, negotiating a peace agreement with Israel would mark only the initial phase of relations. Over time, Israel would change from a Jewish state to the twenty-third Arab state as Palestinian refugees exercised their right of return to Israel.
- In seeking recognition as a Jewish state, Israel asks Palestinians to permanently accept the concept of "two states for two peoples." One state would be Israel - the nation state of the Jewish people. The other state would be Palestine - the nation state of the Palestinian people and the national home for any Palestinian refugees and their descendants.
- Neither Egypt nor Jordan was required to recognize Israel as a Jewish state when signing a treaty of peace with it, but these nations also did not assert a "right of return" to Israeli territory that could dramatically affect the composition and character of Israel.

- Seeking to partition Mandatory Palestine, the United Nations General Assembly in 1947 passed Resolution 181, which called for the creation of two states - a “Jewish state” and an “Arab state.” The Arab world rejected the resolution and five Arab armies invaded Israel when the Jewish state declared its independence in 1948.

American presidents and other leaders have long recognized that Israel is and will be a Jewish state.

- “What America and the international community can do is to state frankly what everyone knows - a lasting peace will involve two states for two peoples: Israel as a Jewish state and the homeland for the Jewish people, and the state of Palestine as the homeland for the Palestinian people, each state enjoying self-determination, mutual recognition, and peace.”
- *President Barack Obama, May 19, 2011*
- “I join with President Obama in expressing to the people of Israel our deep, deep commitment to the security of Israel and to the need to find a peace that recognizes Israel as a Jewish state, recognizes Israel as a country that can defend itself by itself, and that is an important principle with which the prime minister and the president and I are in agreement.”
- *Secretary of State John Kerry, December 5, 2013*
- “...the United States will never abandon its commitment to the security of Israel as a Jewish state and homeland for Jewish people.”
- *President George W. Bush, July 16, 2007*
- “We’ve made clear to all that our commitment to the security and well-being of the Jewish state is absolutely unwavering and will continue to be.”
- *President Bill Clinton, May 7, 1995*
- “Literally hundreds of thousands of Jews from Ethiopia and from the former Soviet Union now make their homes in Israel; and this, more than anything else, is what the Jewish state is all about.”
- *President George H.W. Bush, August 11, 1992*
- “This Government has been informed that a Jewish state has been proclaimed in Palestine, and recognition has been requested by the provisional government thereof. The United States recognizes the provisional government as the de facto authority of the State of Israel.”
- *Harry S. Truman, May 14, 1948*