**[Rabbinic Call to "Kindle the Lights of Peace"](http://btvshalom.org/btvshalom.org/rabbiniccabinetcampaigns.shtml" \l "kindle) - Launched 11/08/07**

**Text and Signers**

As we approach the festival of Chanukah, we American rabbis and cantors call on the American Jewish community to rekindle our commitment to Israeli-Palestinian peace. When we light candles at this darkest time of the year, may we nurture hope for a lasting peace settlement after too many years of violence and despair. If we learn anything from the story of Chanukah, it is that even when circumstances appear grim - perhaps especially then - hope and courage are vital.

At the upcoming Annapolis peace conference, the parties to the conflict will have their first substantive face-to-face meeting in nearly seven years to launch final-status negotiations. For many of us, the heady optimism and promise we felt while witnessing the Clinton peace talks seem like distant dreams. Yet, we must remain alert to the real opportunities emerging right now that need our support.

We urge the American Jewish community to stand behind the conference as it attempts to launch a negotiation process with the goal of a viable Palestinian state, living side-by side and in peace with a secure Israel. We cannot emphasize strongly enough that Israel's long-term peace and security require that this conference be a true starting point for a real, sustained peace process, one characterized by consistent U.S. diplomatic engagement and tangible improvements in living conditions and security for both Israelis and Palestinians.

The next American president will play a critical role in determining whether the results of steps initiated at Annapolis lay the foundation for a final status peace agreement. A large measure of our hopes for peace will be entrusted to whoever wins the 2008 election, and as such, it is crucial that we communicate to all the candidates that a truly pro-Israel president will, with the support of the vast majority of American Jews, do everything in his or her power to bring about a negotiated two-state resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

May the spirit of peace and the light of justice illumine the vision of our leadership for the benefit of our people and our world this Chanukah.

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9. Rabbi Renni S. Altman, Great Neck, NY
10. Rabbi Julia Andelman, New York, NY
11. Rabbi Camille Shira Angel, San Francisco, CA
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13. Rabbi David Ariel-Joel, Louisville, KY
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15. Rabbi Stephen A. Arnold, South Easton, MA
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**Press Release**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**JEWISH PEACE MOVEMENT BUILDS CRITICAL CONGRESSIONAL, RABBINIC SUPPORT FOR ANNAPOLIS CONFERENCE**

CHICAGO—The American Jewish peace movement celebrated major gains this week, mobilizing the support of 135 Members of Congress and more than 500 Jewish clergy for the upcoming Annapolis conference as an opportunity to revive the long-stalled Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and counting a new ally amongst their ranks - AIPAC.

The signatures in support of the Annapolis conference—the first U.S. brokered summit between Israeli, Palestinian and Arab leaders in seven years, now tentatively scheduled for early next week—were amassed through two separate initiatives: a call from rabbis and cantors nationwide organized by Brit Tzedek v’Shalom and a bi-partisan Congressional letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, sponsored by Representatives Gary Ackerman (D-NY) and Charles Boustany (R-LA).

In both cases, Brit Tzedek, the country’s largest and most vibrant grassroots Jewish peace organization, activated its network of 37,000 people across the country to convey to their elected and religious leadership that American Jews not only overwhelmingly support a negotiated, two-state resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but want to see their leaders play an active role in achieving it. A recent poll conducted by Zogby International (June 4, 2007) shows that 87% of American Jews support a two-state solution, while 68% are more likely to support a candidate who promises to take an active role in the peace process.

Five hundred eighteen national pulpit, academic and organizational rabbis and cantors and rabbinic and cantoral students from all major denominations of American Judaism signed on to Brit Tzedek’s rabbinic call—“Kindle the Lights of Peace”— first released only 10 days ago. The Chanukah themed appeal draws on the story of the oil that burned for eight days to remind the community that "even when circumstances appear grim - perhaps especially then - hope and courage are vital."

For the full text of the rabbinic call, go to [**http://ga3.org/btvshalom/alert-description.html?alert\_id=17926064**](http://ga3.org/btvshalom/alert-description.html?alert_id=17926064) For a complete list of signers, go to [**http://ga3.org/campaign/rabbinic\_call/explanation#signers**](http://ga3.org/campaign/rabbinic_call/explanation#signers)

The signers urge the Jewish community to use the rekindled excitement generated by Annapolis to inspire engagement of the candidates during the upcoming election year, realizing, as Rabbi John Friedman, chair of Brit Tzedek’s Rabbinic Cabinet says, that "for the Annapolis talks to become something other than a well-meaning gesture, it is essential that we, as a community, make clear to the current Administration and the one that will succeed it that the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is vital to the interests of all those who live in the region, and the American people."

Among the call’s many prominent signers were Yitzhak Greenberg, former Chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council; Burton L. Visotzky, Professor, Jewish Theological Seminary; Paul Menitoff, Executive Vice-President Emeritus, Central Conference of American Rabbis; and Toba Spitzer, President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association.

“We must make it a priority to demonstrate that a ‘pro-Israel’ candidate is one who both calls unambiguously for a negotiated two-state solution, and has a realistic and robust plan to make it happen," Friedman adds.

Brit Tzedek applauded the Ackerman-Boustany letter sent yesterday to Secretary Rice as an example of proactive, pro-peace leadership the group advocates. The letter expresses support for the Annapolis conference as a “critical opportunity” to reinvigorate the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and urges that “robust, hands-on U.S. leadership and diplomacy is necessary to frame not only on what transpires at the meeting, but on what takes place before and after it.”

"We welcome Representatives Ackerman and Boustany’s impressive initiative expressing the sentiments of the overwhelming majority of American Jews who strongly support U.S.-backed initiatives aimed at reaching a negotiated, two-state resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,” says Brit Tzedek president Steve Masters. “Israel's long-term peace and security require that this conference succeed and the support of the U.S. Congress is a critical factor for ensuring the success over the long haul of this vital peace process."

In a mass mobilization, Brit Tzedek activists from across the country contacted hundreds of Congressional offices to advocate that their representatives support this initiative. The group also worked collaboratively with the other groups who favor a negotiated, two-state resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict— including Americans for Peace Now, Israel Policy Forum, Arab American Institute, American Task Force on Palestine and Churches for Middle East Peace—to build support for the letter both on the Hill and among their respective constituencies.

Ultimately, 135 Representatives signed the letter including more than 1/3 of Congress’ Jewish delegation, among them Rep. Tom Lantos (D-CA), Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, and Henry Waxman (D-CA), dean of the Jewish House members. In addition, the entire delegation from Massachusetts, where three of Brit Tzedek’s strongest chapters are located, signed the letter.

For the full text of the Ackerman-Boustany letter, go to [**http://ga3.org/campaign/AckermanBoustany\_thankyou/explanation#fulltext**](http://ga3.org/campaign/AckermanBoustany_thankyou/explanation#fulltext) For a complete list of signers, go to [**http://ga3.org/campaign/AckermanBoustany\_thankyou/explanation#signers**](http://ga3.org/campaign/AckermanBoustany_thankyou/explanation#signers)

The letter also garnered the support the Union for Reform Judaism (representing American Judaism’s largest denomination), the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation and, perhaps most unexpectedly, that of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which has typically resisted U.S. initiatives aimed at encouraging American leadership in renewing Israeli- Palestinian negotiations.

"The hard work will start the day after Annapolis. That's when the world will be watching to see how serious all the parties - Israeli, Palestinian, American - really are about peace," said Steve Masters, President of Brit Tzedek v'Shalom. "Our efforts to mobilize support for Annapolis demonstrate beyond a shadow of a doubt to the White House, to Members of Congress, and to the presidential candidates that American Jews stand behind genuine peace efforts."

**Media**

[**Courage Of Convictions**](http://btvshalom.org/btvshalom.org/pressrelease/2007/20071123.shtml). By Rabbi Scott Weiner. *Baltimore Jewish Times*. November 23, 2007.

Jews around the world are busily dusting off their menorahs and counting their Chanukah candles to prepare for our winter holiday. The central observance of Chanukkah concerns the miracle of one day’s supply of oil lasting for eight days, no small matter in the festival story.

The lighting of the Chanukkah menorah is testament to that miracle. But why do we have no ritual to commemorate the Maccabees’ victory over the Syrio-Greek army?

Some suggest this is because the rabbis wanted to take the focus off of the military aspect of the holiday in favor of its miraculous post-war symbolism of light and joy; emphasizing peaceful times, rather than violence. Even in our day and age, we, too, try to focus on peace rather than war.

We speak proudly of those moments in Israel’s history when she stood for light and reconciliation, rather than violence and war: her offer to the Arab nations to return all territory in exchange for peace after the 1967 war; the return of the Sinai Peninsula in 1979 in exchange for peace with Egypt; the signing of a peace treaty with Jordan, the offer of land for peace at the Clinton Camp David Summit in 2000 and later at Taba. These were some of Israel’s proudest moments because she stood for peace with tangible proposals.

Soon, for the first time in seven years, Israelis and Palestinians will be sitting down at the same table, beginning serious peace negotiations. The talks in Annapolis are meant to create a process that will eventually lead to two viable states, a Palestinian state, side-by-side and at peace with a secure Israel. And the end of the conflict -- a goal to which we all aspire; a moment to which future generations can point with pride.

Simply put, Israel’s long-term peace and security require that the talks be successful and American Jewish advocacy for a negotiated peace is essential. With a new presidency in the offing, we have a chance to effect real change in the future of the Middle East.

And yet, our institutional leadership has largely failed to come forward in support of the conference. Rather than embrace the opportunity for renewed hope, they have remained hesitant or fearful, unwilling to do the very thing that would provide security for Israel: support this effort for peace. One group of rabbis has even issued an open letter to President Bush calling on him to cancel the conference, lest the Almighty bring destruction to America!

The consequences of failure at these talks would be considerable. Neither Israelis nor the Palestinians have the luxury of enduring more rockets fired on Israel’s southern towns, more military operations inside the occupied territories, more destruction, more despair – but that will be their lot if Annapolis leads nowhere.

By next Chanukah, we will be able to evaluate the success of the conference, based on whether it served as a starting point for a sustained peace process. In the meantime, the American Jewish community must work to ensure that we can look back with satisfaction.

It is significant that in so doing, we will be acting on a long-held Jewish position: polls consistently demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of American Jews support a negotiated, two-state solution. A recent survey indicates that this includes 87 percent of our community, and that 68 percent of us are more likely to support a candidate who pledges to take an active role in the peace process.

Yet even if Annapolis yields great results, it will clearly only be the beginning -– and by next Chanukah, we will look to a new president to move the process forward.

The last seven years have taught us that without consistent U.S. diplomatic engagement, Middle East diplomacy, at best, grinds its wheels; at worst, it bogs down and slips into full-fledged violence. We in the American Jewish community must make clear to all presidential candidates –- regardless of party -– that commitment to Israel means challenging, not supporting the status quo. Being “pro-Israel” must also mean doing everything possible to bring about a negotiated, two-state solution between Israelis and Palestinians.

Being pro-Israel means being pro-peace.

Without a clear commitment from the American Jewish community, though, the presidential candidates will continue to hedge their pro-Israel stance into a pro-status quo position. Without our advocacy, they will find it too easy to stand by the status quo, failing to take the courageous steps necessary to make real change possible.

The American Jewish community must not allow this to happen, and neither should we support a new administration which acts as President Bush has, waiting seven years before fully engaging in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking. We know far too well the consequences of diplomatic neglect.

The words of the prophet Zechariah, which we read at Hanukkah time each year, warn us against relying on either might or power. Neither alone can guarantee Israel’s peace and security.

Let us act to support a successful outcome to the Annapolis conference, and call upon every one of the presidential candidates to demonstrate their commitment to Israel through their support for the peace process and an active American role in that process.

When we arrive at Chanukah next year, will we look back in pride at a new beginning in the Middle East? If that is our goal, let us stand strongly for the Annapolis conference and embrace the possibility of peace. As we light our candles of miracles, let us light them for peace.

*Rabbi Weiner serves as rabbi of Hebrew Tabernacle Congregation in New York City and as a board and Rabbinic Cabinet member of Brit Tzedek v’Shalom, the Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace.*

[**US Jews Pro-peace**](http://btvshalom.org/btvshalom.org/pressrelease/2007/20071128.shtml). *Jerusalem Post*. November 28 , 2007

Sir, - While Hilary Kreiger's portrayal of the almost complete silence on the part of the American Jewish organizational establishment regarding the upcoming Annapolis peace conference is accurate, she misses the mark by calling them "mainstream," implying that they represent the prevailing sentiment among American Jews ("US Jewish groups unusually mum amid summit skepticism," November 23).

In fact, polls have consistently demonstrated that the overwhelming majority of American Jews agree with the aims of the Annapolis conference. Most recently, a survey in June 2007 found that 87 percent of American Jews support a two-state solution, while 68% are more likely to support a presidential candidate who promises to take an active role in the peace process.

While the Jewish establishment seems to be suffering from a case of laryngitis on Annapolis, the pro-Israel, pro-peace majority has been getting our message across loud and clear. Last week, following intensive outreach to congressional offices by thousands of activists across the country, 135 members of Congress, including more than a third of the Jewish delegation, signed a letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice urging her to seize and build on the opportunity to revive peace negotiations created by Annapolis. The letter was backed by the Union of Reform Judaism and AIPAC, among others. Support for Annapolis was echoed by a Rabbinic Call to American Jews issued by Brit Tzedek v'Shalom and signed by over 500 rabbis and cantors nationwide.

It is high time that our community had leaders who realize that history has shown that Israel's security can only be brought about through successful peace negotiations.

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