Sixty Brit Tzedek v’Shalom activists from all around the nation gathered in Washington, D.C. for our first National Advocacy Days on June 27-28, 2005. We were received warmly and respectfully, as a force to be reckoned with. Briefings were held on day one with a wide range of experienced advocates and policy makers. There was a shared feeling that despite significant challenges, the present moment represents a new window of opportunity for peace and progress in the Middle East.

A consensus quickly emerged regarding a visible and effective advocacy campaign: 1) delegates need to visit the Hill regularly; 2) elected officials should be visited in their home districts as often as possible; 3) members should speak in public or write letters on issues that concern us; and 4) we need to thank and publicly praise public officials when they stand with us. Many of the speakers remarked that our identity as a national Jewish organization is extremely important — especially since we can mobilize potential voters.

Senate and House offices were visited on day two and administration officials met with us in generally promising meetings. The leaders and staff members we met with often expressed great interest in our message. They were grateful to hear from a moderate Jewish peace group at a time when far-right and far-left advocates have been so vocal. Many also took notice of our large nationwide constituency and our rapid growth over a three-year period.

We take from our Advocacy Days the clear understanding that Brit Tzedek’s message is one for which many American decision makers have been waiting. Congress is not a monolith and neither are the two parties. In the past, members have been inundated with aggressive policies many know are not quite right. We in the peace camp must find new and better ways to reach those on both sides of the aisle who want to see peace and justice in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There is presently greater openness in Congress and the Administration alike. We must exploit this openness aggressively and get across the fact that ours is, in fact, the mainstream position.

IN THIS ISSUE:
National Advocacy Days, 1
Activists Report, 1
President’s Letter, 2
Let Brit Tzedek Grow, 2
Our Grassroots Base, 2
Chapter News, 3
Executive Director Message, 3
Tour Schedule 2005, 3
Contribute, 4

ACTIVISTS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES
“It was really thrilling to sit in the office of my Senator and have a staff member assure our delegation that we have a friend on our issues with the Senator.” — Bloomington Chapter Chair Sue Swartz who met with Kim Savit, Senior Professional Staff Member for Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN), Chair of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

“Price agrees with us on every substantial issue pertaining to the Middle East. He will be a good friend to us when important legislation is at stake.” — Board member Rabbi John Friedman who met with Rep. David Price (D-NC)

“It was rejuvenating to be able to meet with elected officials and advocate for issues that are so important to us, and which receive far too little attention. Further, it was wonderful to be surrounded by people who felt similarly, both within Brit Tzedek and among Washington insiders. Many elected officials were sympathetic to our position, caring for the well-being of Israel, but believing that Israel’s well-being is best assured through a just peace between Israel and the Palestinians.” — Rhode Island Chapter Co-chair, Daniel Orenstein, who met with Senator Lincoln Chafee (R-RI)
Dear Friends of Brit Tzedek,

After 38 years, no longer do Israelis live illegally on Palestinian land in Gaza. With the assistance of the “Quartet” (the US, the UN, the European Union and Russia), the pullout proceeded for the most part in an orderly manner, though of course the violence of the “Hill Youth” will preoccupy our thoughts for some time to come. The physical occupation of Gaza is at an end.

Without doubt we have turned a corner, thanks to the determination of the one man who could make it happen, Ariel Sharon, and the unexpected active cooperation proffered by the only other man who could make it happen, George Bush.

Brit Tzedek has had a small part in creating this new opportunity for peace. We have provided support to members of Congress who stood up against blind majority backing for Israeli government decisions and who have opposed support for the Palestinian Authority, right or wrong. We’ve given significant support to the administration as it actively re-engaged in the conflict, and this has been critical, for the backing of the American Jewish community is necessary to enable the administration and Congress to assist Israelis and Palestinians as they move forward toward peace.

With the gift of your time, financial support, or both, we will be able to make a much greater difference in the months ahead.

For the immediate future, the two sides, with Quartet assistance, will haggle over the seaport, the airport, water rights, and ease of passage in and out of Gaza. This may take months. At the same time, leaders on both sides are engaged in electioneering.

And, as all this is happening, Israel continues to establish ‘facts on the ground’ in the West Bank — expanded settlements, continued rapid construction of the security barrier around Jerusalem and Ariel, and internal expansion in East Jerusalem. The stakes are very high. Either two sovereign nations co-existing side-by-side, or continued violence leading to unknown ends, will emerge.

Perhaps in the months ahead the outlines will already be clear.

B SHALOM, MARCIA FREEDMAN
President, Brit Tzedek v Shalom
There are now 31 Brit Tzedek chapters around the country with the newest chapter formed in Rhode Island this summer. In a coordinated nationwide effort, 20 Brit Tzedek chapters met with the home district offices of over 30 U.S. Senators and Representatives in the first bi-annual Home District Advocacy Initiative. The elected officials and their staff representatives were on the whole very responsive to Brit Tzedek’s “Pro-Israel! Pro-Peace! Progress!” message, with many expressing interest in building a long-term relationship with chapter representatives. More than 60 activists participated in the training series. Brit Tzedek chapters gained extensive media attention through many op-eds, letters to the editor, and interviews of local leadership.

New York City Chapter Launches Young Adults Program
Following a successful meeting at this year’s national conference, a group of post-college members of the NYC chapter launched the Young Adults program, with monthly discussions, happy hours and attendance at cultural events.

Boston Chapter Invited to Sit on the JCRC
The Boston chapter became the first Brit Tzedek chapter invited to the Jewish Community Relations Council. Chapter co-chair Beth Wasserman is on the JCRC’s board and CEO Diane Balsar sits on the Israeli Roundtable Forum.

Brit Tzedek Sponsored Tours

Jeff Albert, PhD, is CEO and Co-Founder of the Aquaya Institute, a nonprofit dedicated to research, testing, and promotion of water resource innovations in the developing world. Jeff worked with the Israeli Water Commission from 1998-2001. Since 1997, he’s been involved in a variety of Israeli-Palestinian water and environmental projects. Jeff, a Brit Tzedek Board Member will speak on the role of water and geography in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

San Francisco Bay Area, CA October 26  Seattle and Olympia, WA December TBD
Diane Balsar, new CEO of Brit Tzedek, was Executive Director of the Women’s State-Wide Legislative Network and Alliance, founding and building the largest network representing women on public policy issues in Massachusetts. She will speak on “What American Jews can do to work towards peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

Detroit, MI November 7  Ann Arbor, East Lansing and Kalamazoo, MI Date TBD
Yossi Beilin, head of Israel’s Yachad party, formed to unite and reinvoke the peace camp. He served in the Knesset for 11 years and held ministerial positions in three governments. In 2001, Mr. Beilin, Yasser Abed Rabbo and a team of Israelis and Palestinians successfully negotiated the Geneva Accord, a draft final status agreement. Co-architect of the Geneva Accord and former member of Knesset, Mr. Beilin will speak on the current political situation.

New York City October 23  Co-sponsored with Congregation B’nai Jeshurun
Breaking the Silence is an organization of former combat soldiers dedicated to highlighting the occupation’s harmful impact on both Palestinians and Israelis. Avivchay Sharon and Noam Chayut, former combat soldiers from the Israeli organization Breaking the Silence will speak and show photos from their service highlighting the harmful repercussions of the occupation on Israelis and Palestinians.

Madison, WI October 20  Chicago, IL October 23  Portland, OR October 26
Jeffrey Levy, executive director and founder of the international human rights organization, Breaking the Silence, will speak at the fall conference. He will discuss the transformation of the occupation and the resulting human rights abuses, with an analysis of the role of the U.S. and its allies.

Madison, WI October 27  Seattle, WA October 30
Chaim Yavin, “the Walter Cronkite of Israeli TV,” wrote, directed, produced and filmed a documentary on the impact of the occupation on Israeli politics and society. “Since 1967, we have been brutal conquerors, occupiers, suppressing another people,” he says. “We have all created a situation that is horrific. It is enormous and complex and we all have a responsibility to find a solution that puts an end to the suffering of everyone.” Yavin, Israeli journalist, filmmaker and news anchor, will speak about his critically acclaimed five-part documentary, Yoman Masa (In the Land of the Settlers.)

New York City October 28  Co-sponsored with Americans for Peace Now and Workmen’s Circle
For more information email chapter@btvshalom.org or visit www.btvshalom.org/director/tours_index.shtml.

Recent Speaker Tour
Marcia Freedman, President of Brit Tzedek v’Shalom, was one of the founders of the feminist movement in Israel. She was elected to the Knesset, serving from 1973-1977. She also was active in the Israeli peace movement, and helped to pioneer a network of services for women. Freedman is the author of, Exile in the Promised Land. Marcia spoke in Durham-Chapel Hill, NC and Atlanta, GA on Beyond Gaza: The Role of American Jews.

Jennifer Miller, daughter of U.S. State Department negotiator Aaron Miller, recently released her first book, Inheriting the Holy Land, about her perspective on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a young adult and alumni of Seeds of Peace. She addressed these issues last month in Washington DC.

MESSAGE FROM ALIZA BECKER
Executive Director, Brit Tzedek v’Shalom

Following the Gaza-disengagement there is heated debate within Israel (especially with upcoming elections) and among Diaspora Jews about the future of Israeli-Palestinian relations. The withdrawal has changed the terms of debate in ways that we cannot truly begin to predict. There will be those who believe that Israel has done all it can. There are others, especially we in Brit Tzedek, who believe that Gaza must be the first step, not the last, towards a negotiated two-state solution.

Given our message of support for just such a solution, Brit Tzedek must take a strong position in shaping the debate. We need to encourage dialogue and discussion within the American Jewish community, in all venues: synagogues, Jewish federations, college campuses, town hall meetings, the Jewish media and the general media. We need to make the discussion of the future of peace efforts central to the discussion of Israel’s future. We need to be an outspoken voice for positions such as:

- “Gaza First” cannot be allowed to become “Gaza Last”
- Settlement growth must be frozen, in keeping with the U.S.-sponsored Road Map to Peace to which Israel is committed
- Further withdrawal from West Bank settlements is vital
- Intensive efforts must be made to move both partners back to the negotiating table

Given the role the U.S. government plays in Israel, and the importance Israel has for Jews worldwide, this discussion must take center stage among American Jewry. There was a time not long ago when many of us may have felt hesitant to state our views, believing perhaps that there was no one to listen. If that was ever true, however, it certainly isn’t true today. We can make it happen.
CONTRIBUTE

Your tax-deductible membership contribution to Brit Tzedek v’Shalom will strengthen the voice of the American Jewish community in its call for a negotiated, two-state resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Help us continue to do our work in communities across the United States.

Make a donation now.

Make a secure donation online at www.btvshalom.org or send a check, payable to “Brit Tzedek,” and mail to:

Brit Tzedek v’Shalom
11 East Adams Street
Suite 707
Chicago, Illinois 60603

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Editor: Alison Pepper
Contributors: Carinne Luck, Emily Hauser
Designer: Lindsey Payne

Brit Tzedek v’Shalom, the Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace
11 East Adams, Suite 707
Chicago, IL 60603
(312) 341-1205
Fax: (312) 341-1206
info@btvshalom.org
www.btvshalom.org