



Inside Brit Tzedek

BRIT TZEDEK V'SHALOM

JEWISH ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE & PEACE

NATIONAL ADVOCACY DAYS: JUNE 18-20, 2006

Washington Takes Center Stage

The mission of Brit Tzedek v'Shalom, the Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace is to educate and mobilize American Jews in support of a negotiated two-state resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Brit Tzedek's annual National Advocacy Days (June 18-20) are fast approaching, with an important difference this year: **We have the added benefit of a permanent Washington office.** Our newly established office has raised Brit Tzedek's political profile considerably, providing a voice in the nation's capital, up-to-date information about legislative matters and ongoing support for advocates.



Congressman Brad Sherman (center) meets with Rob Levy and Diane Balser at the opening of the Washington office.

Our Advocacy Days will draw activists from all over the country; our focus will be on expanding and strengthening our base of support in Congress. Participants will hear from D.C. insiders about current congressional and Administration thinking on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, learn how best to influence policy decisions, and then head over to the Hill to carry our message directly to our lawmakers.

The opening plenary on June 18, at the D.C. Jewish Community Center, will feature Robert Malley and Amjad Atallah. Malley, a former special assistant for Arab-Israeli affairs to President Bill Clinton and a

member of the American peace team at Camp David in the summer of 2000, is Middle East and North Africa program director at the International Crisis Group, an organization working to prevent and resolve deadly conflict. Atallah is President of the Strategic Assessments Initiative, providing legal and policy assistance to parties involved in peace negotiations. Previously, Mr. Atallah advised the PLO's Negotiations Affairs Department and PA President Mahmoud Abbas's office in peace negotiations with Israel. There will also be two preconference training sessions on Sunday afternoon.

On Monday, June 19, participants will receive briefings from key Washington-based allies, including Lara Friedman, government relations director of Americans for Peace Now, Jeremy Rabinowitz, chief of staff for Representative Lois Capps, and M. J. Rosenberg, director of policy analysis for the Israel Policy Forum. In the afternoon an intensive hands-on training with Brit Tzedek leaders, will be followed by an evening reception on Capitol Hill. On Tuesday, June 20, attendees will spend the day in meetings on the Hill with members of Congress and their staffers.

The presence of the Washington office positions Brit Tzedek as a leader in the effort to better utilize the American political process to achieve peace and security for Israel through negotiations.

As the office, headed by Rob Levy, builds its presence in the capital, it becomes even more critical that Brit Tzedek activists engage in advocacy both in legislators' home districts and on the Hill in order to build and maintain momentum. Rob is a former legislative assistant at the Religious Action Center, the Reform movement's public policy arm and worked in the office of former Senator Jon Corzine (D-N.J.).

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RABBIS' LETTER GARNERS NEARLY 400 SIGNATURES!

In March, nearly 400 rabbis from across the country and the denominational spectrum signed a letter spearheaded by Brit Tzedek's Rabbinic Cabinet, urging President Bush to maintain "constructive engagement" with moderate Palestinians and continue critically needed humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people. The full text of the letter was printed in the Forward on March 10, and the impressive number of signatories generated significant interest in both the Jewish and general press. To read more about the letter, please visit www.rabbisletter.btvshalom.org. For more information on Brit Tzedek's Rabbinic Cabinet, please contact its chair, Rabbi John Friedman, at rabbifriedman@btvshalom.org.



Dear Friends of Brit Tzedek,

Once again, the unexpected has happened and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has entered a new era. The settlers and their Likud supporters have been isolated and routed. Israeli voters voted overwhelmingly for parties that support putting an end to the occupation and dealing with the socio-economic issues that the costs of the occupation have created.

It is by no means obvious, however, that the new Israeli government or the new Palestinian leadership will choose the path of a negotiated settlement. One problem, of course, is the new Palestinian government. Though there are indications that the pragmatists among Hamas' leadership are moderating their stance, there are also indications of the opposite.

However, Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority has expressed his continued desire, and his authority to negotiate with Israel in the name of the Palestinian people, promising to bring a final status agreement to a referendum if necessary.

"We believe that a real peace, a negotiated settlement, is still possible, but this year may be the last for a long time that the window of opportunity remains open."

Will Israel extend a hand that is being extended to it, to sit in good faith with the Palestinians to negotiate mutually agreed upon borders and all other final status issues? There are strong voices in the new government favoring a negotiated settlement, but there are also strong voices favoring unilateral determination of borders. It is not clear who will prevail.

We believe that a real peace, a negotiated settlement, is still possible, but this year may be the last for a long time that the window of opportunity remains open.

As always, the role of the U.S. is critical. Brit Tzedek will be proactive in urging the U.S. government to bring the two sides together for negotiations and to withhold international support for unilateral proposals that are aimed to determine the final border between Israel and the future State of Palestine.

Our work will be difficult, because our positions are neither popular nor simple. But Brit Tzedek is strong and vibrant, and we are up to the task.

**B'SHALOM,
MARCIA FREEDMAN**

President, Brit Tzedek v'Shalom



Building Israeli-Palestinian Peace in Uncertain Times

BRIT TZEDEK'S WESTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE

Our work is to keep our eyes on the prize," declared Brit Tzedek president Marcia Freedman as she opened the Western Regional Conference held on February 18-19 in the San Francisco Bay area. "There is only one way [toward peace]: a negotiated agreement and international borders agreed upon by both sides."

Brit Tzedek's first regional conference provided valuable time for networking for the 150 activists who participated. Leading scholars and activists spoke at plenary sessions and workshops on topics ranging from new developments in Congress and on Capitol Hill, to the role of the Bible in Israeli political debate, to the significance of water resources in the Arab-Israeli conflict. At one workshop Rabbis Roberto Graetz, George Gittleman, and Joshua Levine Grater shared ideas on how to open up constructive discussion of the conflict in synagogues.

In the opening plenary on the Palestinian and then-pending Israeli elections, keynote speaker Stephen P. Cohen argued that although Kadima [the new Israeli centrist party] has no interest in negotiations, the Israeli public wants the government to negotiate, even with Hamas, to develop a stable, nonviolent end to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. "The era of occupation has eroded too much of the nature of Israeli society," he declared. "Killing and being killed will not be eliminated by military force."

Amjad Atallah also addressed the trend toward unilateralism on both sides of the conflict, noting that votes for Kadima and Hamas are for security, not peace. Atallah struck a hopeful note regarding Hamas's recent victory in the Palestinian elections, pointing out "there continue to be a majority of Palestinians who support the path of negotiations to a two-state solution as opposed to armed resistance."

* "Either you are passive or you speak up," asserted Brit Tzedek Executive Director Diane Balser in her keynote address. "We need loud advocacy for the long-term interests of the Jewish people, and that has to include seeing Jews and Palestinians living side by side peacefully."

In the closing plenary on the prospects for a negotiated settlement, Omar Dajani, professor of law at the University of the Pacific and a former Palestinian negotiator, stressed the importance of Brit Tzedek's work in fostering a climate in which Israelis and Palestinians could return to the negotiating table: "It is critically important for you . . . to convince other Jews here and in Israel of the critical importance of negotiation and beyond negotiation, a two-state solution, based on basic principles of justice."

Menachem Klein, a former advisor to Prime Minister Ehud Barak and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, endorsed the need for "an alternative to unilateralism-unilateralism as a strategy, and unilateralism as a state of mind."

Brit Tzedek's next regional conference is set to take place in Chicago in the fall.*

[continued from p. 1] The D.C. office doesn't just bring the grassroots to Washington; it brings Washington to the grassroots. Having a presence on the Hill increases the political savvy of Brit Tzedek activists, keeping them up to date on the latest details of legislation and analysis of the political environment as it develops.

Neither did our Washington office go unnoticed by the Jewish press: Reporting on the warm welcome it received, the *Washington Jewish Week* noted that one Congressional staffer told Levy, "Just you being here has made a difference," while another asked happily, "Where have you been?" The article also quoted Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism "Having another . . . sensible, thoughtful, pro-peace process voice [in Washington] will strengthen that voice to more fully reflect the spectrum of voices in the American Jewish community."

To find out more about National Advocacy Days, including information on registration, lodging and scholarships, visit btvshalom.org. *

Activism in a Jewish Community Near You

Brit Tzedek welcomed two new chapters into the family this year: Cleveland, our first chapter in Ohio, and Kalamazoo, our third chapter in Michigan.

Chapters Nationwide Hold Discussions on Israeli and Palestinian Elections

Early in 2006, chapters across the country led the way in providing their Jewish communities with educational events on the run-up to and implications of the Palestinian and Israeli elections respectively. Brit Tzedek board member and Los Angeles chapter co-chair Rabbi Joshua Levine-Grater held the first of these events in which he facilitated about 100 congregants at Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center in a listening session

immediately following the Palestinian elections. "People just needed to be together and feel the community support at this time," said Grater. Many of the subsequent events incorporated this model.

Chapters in Ann Arbor, Kansas City, St. Louis, and western Massachusetts organized house parties to listen to and discuss *Ha'aretz* columnist Akiva Eldar's insights; the Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and Seattle chapters hosted speakers, including former Barak advisor Menachem Klein, Israeli academic and essayist Bernard Avishai, and Professors Shai Feldman, Joel Migdal, and Khalil Shikaki. Portland and Austin, brought local Israeli, Jewish, and Palestinian community activists together to discuss the various changes within Israeli and the PA.

Rep. Delahunt Speaks in Martha's Vineyard, Endorsing Two-State Solution
Brit Tzedek Martha's Vineyard chapter members packed the house to hear Congressman William Delahunt, a member of the House International Relations Committee, participate in a panel discussion on the U.S. role in facilitating a negotiated two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Brit Leadership Speaks in East Coast Synagogues

Temple Emanuel in Worcester, MA hosted Executive Director Diane Balser. Brit Tzedek Board member David Matz spoke at Temple Beth Abraham in Nashua, NH. Brit Tzedek advocacy chair Steve Masters taught a class on "Current Issues Facing Israel" for the Har Zion Temple sisterhood in suburban Philadelphia.

MESSAGE FROM DIANE BALSER

Executive Director, Brit Tzedek v'Shalom



In March, I went to Israel and the occupied territories with our Washington staffer, Rob Levy. With the help of our allies in the Geneva Initiative Office, we met with political leaders in the Israeli peace movement from Kadima, Labor and Mertz as well as leaders of the PLO in Ramallah, including Yasser Abed Rabbo, a member of the PLO Executive Committee and a key writer of the Geneva Initiative. In addition we were given tour of the West Bank sponsored by B'Tselem, the Israel Information Center for Human Rights.

It was wonderful representing Brit Tzedek v' Shalom in Israel and the West Bank, experiencing the debates about the conflict first hand right before the elections. We were well received and deeply appreciated for the work we are doing. It gave me a picture of the parallel movements being built among Israelis, Palestinians, US Jews to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There are actually many potential partners for peace contrary to the rhetoric that there are no partners for peace.

The trip strengthened my conviction that we need to keep building our organization in the U.S. as American Jews. **We need to:**

- ★ **Bring more of the debate that occurs in Israel to American Jewry.** For instance, the "centrist" position in Israel includes the belief that the occupation needs to end and that the settlements have been and are an obstacle towards any solution to the conflict.
- ★ **Better communicate why punishing the Palestinian people for their election is not in the interest of Israelis or the Palestinians.** Our Rabbis letter was a wonderful model of that kind of active communication.
- ★ **Stay focused on our fundamental vision, U.S involvement to ensure a negotiated settlement.** Most, who are left of center in Israel, understand that negotiations are far preferable to unilateralism.

Thank you to every member and supporter of Brit Tzedek v' Shalom.

Bite-Sized Activism—The Brit Tzedek Way



CARINNE LUCK

Director of Chapter and Grassroots Development, Brit Tzedek v'Shalom

You can become a Brit Tzedek activist, regardless of whether you live in an area with a local chapter. Our 32 chapters are unquestionably the anchors of the organization, so if there is a chapter in your community, you can take these actions as part of a broader local collective.

Here are some suggestions for how to make your pro-Israel, pro-peace voice heard in your community:

- ★ **Become a resource.** Brit Tzedek can provide you with fact sheets, maps, and educational materials to give you greater confidence in your knowledge of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the U.S. role in it.
- ★ **Display Brit Tzedek materials.** Is there an information table at your synagogue or Jewish community center? Ask if you can bring brochures, newsletters, and other promotional material to these venues; if so, we can send you everything you need.
- ★ **Throw a house party.** Invite friends and people in your social network to discuss their thoughts about how American Jews should respond to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Brit Tzedek can provide you with a house party guide, discussion talking points, news articles, and much more to help you get started.
- ★ **Hold a film screening.** Brit Tzedek has an extensive library of both documentary and feature films. Check out our listings, borrow your chosen film, and organize a screening for members of your community in your home or at your synagogue or community center. As always, Brit Tzedek can provide you with talking points and/or discussion ideas.
- ★ **Become an advocate for peace.** Respond to Brit Tzedek's action alerts calling on supporters to contact their congressional representatives or the White House to protest harmful action or show appreciation for positive steps taken. When you take action, you ensure that your voice is heard in Washington.
- ★ **Sign our petitions.** Sign on to our campaigns, and encourage your friends, family, and fellow congregants to do the same. We'll send you all the petitions you need; just sign people up and send them back.
- ★ **Bring a Brit Tzedek speaker to your community.** Ask your local synagogue or other Jewish organization to host a discussion on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Our staff and board members can provide Brit Tzedek's perspective on the current situation; contact info@btvshalom.org for details.
- ★ **Become a Brit Tzedek member.** Go to btvshalom.org, join or renew your membership, and encourage others to do the same. Numbers count. We need you!
- ★ **Start a Brit Tzedek chapter!** (OK, I said chapters aren't the only way to become an activist, but as the director of chapter development, I had to give it a plug!) Contact me, Carinne, at chapter@btvshalom.org to find out how you can create an ongoing Brit Tzedek presence in your city or for more information on chapter events.

No matter where you are, no matter how little time you have, you can do something to ensure that Brit Tzedek's message is heard within the American Jewish community.

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

Brit Tzedek Rabbinic Cabinet Leader's Op-ed on Rabbinic Letter

"My colleagues and I believe that this administration needs to think through its attitude toward the new Palestinian political realities with the utmost care. On a pragmatic level, making any decision without waiting to see how the Palestinian leadership actually behaves now is surely not the wisest course. In political terms, introducing draconian aid-cutting measures and imposing diplomatic isolation will serve only to diminish U.S. influence and close off opportunities for dialogue, both of which are vital to achieve the goal of a negotiated, final settlement."

—Rabbi John Friedman, *The News and Observer*, March 21, 2006

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