



Inside Brit Tzedek

BRIT TZEDEK V'SHALOM

JEWISH ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE & PEACE

CAMPAIGN FOCUSES ON THE INCOMING ADMINISTRATION

Brit Tzedek Rallies Thousands in Time to Choose Campaign

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 2008 *Time To Choose Peace* campaign rallied grassroots activists across America to renew their dedication to the active pursuit of Israeli-Palestinian peace. The campaign was launched with a Pledge sent to tens of thousands of supporters.

The response was terrific! Some chose to join their local Brit Tzedek chapter, others pledged to speak with friends about the issues, and some chose to meet with candidates to discuss our message. *Time to Choose* also encouraged activists to attend Brit Tzedek's "Advocacy Days" — the annual event at which we bring the message of a negotiated two-state solution directly to this nation's lawmakers — and many did.

The culmination of these efforts came in the hugely successful "**Rabbinic Letter to President-elect Barack Obama.**" signed (as this newsletter goes to print) by more than 800 rabbis, cantors, and seminary students, including such prominent rabbis as Peter Knobel and Toba Spitzer, the presidents of the Reform and Reconstructionist rabbinical associations, Arthur Green, Elliot Dorff, Lewis Barth, David Gordis, and Ismar Schorsch, present and former leaders of prominent rabbinical schools, and prominent pulpit rabbis across the denominational spectrum, such as Sharon Kleinbaum and Jack Moline.

Our community's spiritual leaders call on the President-elect to over-turn the Bush Administration's policies of inaction and neglect by:

- * dedicating himself to the establishment of a viable Palestinian state living in peace alongside Israel, early in his first term
- * appointing, within his first 100 days in office, a high-level envoy to the region, an individual with the respect of Israelis, Palestinians, and the American people, and ready access to the Oval Office
- * establishing mechanisms of enforcement and follow-through, so that decisions made and agreements signed will be brought to fruition

The Rabbinic letter was published in a full page ad in the *Forward* newspaper and in 13 community papers featuring prominent local signers. The story was also covered on 1557 radio stations. To date, twelve op-eds and news articles have appeared in press across the country about the letter including op-eds by Rabbi Arnold Rachlis in the *Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles* and by Rabbinic Cabinet chair Rabbi John Friedman in *The Raleigh News and Observer*. As a result of our work over the last year, Brit Tzedek is positioned to organize the Jewish grassroots to step up immediately, and act decisively to show the country, our Congress, and the next Administration that the clear majority of our community will actively support a two-state solution. *

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BRIT TZEDEK AT THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION



Denver chapter members Mark Belkin, Sara Jackson, and Randall Kuhn with Rep. Tim Ryan (D-OH) (second from right).

A Brit Tzedek delegation attended the Democratic National Convention, including Denver Chapter head Mark Belkin and Rabbinic Cabinet member, Rabbi Stephen Booth-Nadav. The activists attended many events, several at the invitation of the National Jewish Democratic Council, including the Middle East Policy and Jewish Community Outreach Discussion, a reception for Jewish Democratic Congresspeople, and a panel discussion sponsored by the New America Foundation. "I spoke with a number of Congressional representatives," Rabbi Booth-Nadav reports. "I found a lot of receptivity to our work."



**WE WHO BELIEVE IN PEACE
CANNOT REST UNTIL IT COMES**

Now that Barack Obama has been elected President, some may feel that we can take a well deserved rest. After all, hasn't President-elect Obama promised in a recent policy speech to "take an active role and make a personal commitment to do all I can to advance the cause of peace from the start of my administration."

Yet, even now, in these early days of transition, there are already signs that the forces in the Jewish community that brought us the vicious anti-Obama smears are preparing to wage a fear-laced campaign against any Obama peace initiatives toward Israel and Palestine.

I'm reminded of a story about a meeting that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had with leaders of the labor movement who were trying to convince FDR to back a piece of progressive legislation. After hours of discussion, FDR summed things up: "Gentlemen, you have totally convinced me that you are right. Now, go out there into the world and force me to do it".

What FDR was really saying was that no matter the strength of his convictions, even the President of the United States is not powerful enough to single handedly overcome the powerful forces that will inevitably be lined up in opposition to his policy agenda. To succeed, he'll need to put together a winning coalition of legislative leaders and outside organizations to clear away those obstacles.

That's why all 40,000 of us, brought together by Brit Tzedek into a powerful grassroots force, are so important.

President Obama needs us to wage an effective and successful grassroots campaign, inside the American Jewish community to back his peacemaking efforts. **The time has come for us to take the incredible energy and passion that many of us pored into the Presidential campaign and bring it into our Brit Tzedek work.**

We cannot afford to sit back and let President Obama go it alone when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The great civil rights leader Ella Baker taught us — "We who believe in freedom can not rest until it comes." The same holds true for peace.

STEVE MASTERS
President, Brit Tzedek v'Shalom



Grassroots Leadership Training Institute and National Advocacy Days 2008

"The only way to settle the problems of the Middle East is through the path that you are traveling, that you are leading." — Rep. Mike Capuano, at Brit Tzedek's annual National Advocacy Days Congressional Reception



Pictured left: The California delegation with Senator Dianne Feinstein (CA). Pictured right: MK Yossi Beilin speaks to Brit Tzedek at the Sixth and I Historic Synagogue in Washington, DC.

Brit Tzedek activists from across the country converged in Washington, D.C. this past June to take part in three and a half invigorating days of organizing, training, networking, and advocating to promote Brit Tzedek's pro-Israel, pro-peace message. Nearly 150 strong, we met with inspiring leaders, learned from each other, and ascended the Hill with a renewed sense of purpose, one firmly founded in our successes of the past.

The conference began with opening remarks from President Steve Masters and Executive Director Diane Balser. They addressed the American Jewish peace movement, and the growth of our grassroots leadership, and the opening plenary, *The Brit Tzedek Community: A Conversation Among Leaders and Activists From Across the Country*, led us to vital discussions of our inspiration as we work for Israeli-Palestinian peace, and highlights of the past year.

Participants attended a variety of workshops to fortify their organizing skills, and hone their leadership on three tracks: grassroots skills, leadership and development, and media and communications. The challenges of organizing in the American Jewish community was the topic of the lunch meeting keynoted by Rabbinic Cabinet Co-Chair Rabbi Julie Saxe-Taller; Executive Director of the Union of Progressive Zionists, Tammy Shapiro; and Chapter Development Chair, Cherie Brown.

Yossi Beilin, one of the foremost experts on Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, a former chairman of the Meretz-Yachad party, and the chief Israeli architect of the Geneva Accord, keynoted the evening session. He closed with a clarion call, that for the sake of Israel and the United States, the next U.S. president must reinstate America's role as a trusted broker for peace in the region.

Participants were trained in preparation for meetings on Capitol Hill the following day. The training included a panel discussion on the role of Congress and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, featuring Puneet Talwar, chief Mideast adviser to Senator Joe Biden (DE) and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Tommy Ross, foreign policy adviser to Representative David Price (NC).

Activists then trained on the "how-tos" of a successful advocacy visit, discussing advanced advocacy strategies. To close out the training, Daniel Levy, Senior Fellow at the New America Foundation, gave an up-to-the-minute briefing on the latest events from the region.

That evening we raised our glasses at Brit Tzedek's annual National Advocacy Days Congressional Reception on Capitol Hill, featuring three esteemed Members of Congress: Reps. Mike Capuano (D-MA), Charles Boustany (R-LA), and Henry Waxman (D-CA). In the words of Rep. Capuano, "the only way to settle the problems of the Middle East is through the path that you are traveling, that you are leading." [continued on p. 4]

Activism in a Jewish Community Near You — A 2008 REPORT

Chapters Nationwide Host Gershon Baskin and Hanna Siniora Brit Tzedek hosted a ten-city speaking tour with Gershon Baskin and Hanna Siniora, the co-directors of Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI), the only joint Israeli-Palestinian think tank in the world. Tour stops included synagogues in Atlanta, Denver, Detroit, and San Francisco.

Brit Tzedek Leadership Speaks Across the Country Brit Tzedek Board President Steve Masters spoke in Boston at the Reconstructionist Biennial Convention, in Chicago and Milwaukee with policy analyst Ghaith Al-Omari, and in Philadelphia with former MK Yossi Beilin. Executive Director Diane Balser spoke at the conference "Jews Uniting to End the War and Heal America" in New York, as well as with Palestinian peace activist Aziz Abu Sarah in Albany

and at a chapter event in Seattle. Deputy Director Aliza Becker and Palestinian activist Saffiya Shillo showcased a dual narrative discussion program at four Chicago-area synagogues. Executive Committee member Aaron Ahuvia led a conversation in Ann Arbor, "How to Talk With your Jewish Friends about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," and headlined inaugural events for Brit Tzedek's two new Maine chapters. Treasurer David Albert spoke about his doctoral thesis on the American-Israeli relationship with chapters in Boston, New Haven, and New York City.

Israeli 60th Anniversary Chapter Tabling Chapters in Boston, Chicago, Minnesota, NYC, Portland, and Providence tabled at local 60th Israeli Anniversary community events. They shared literature including our newest publication, "Pointing the Way to Peace & Security: A Resource for Rabbis and Cantors on Israel's 60th Birthday" and had conversations with many attendees about Brit Tzedek's pro-peace work.

New York City Chapter Runs with Home District Advocacy Following a home district meeting with the NYC Chapter, Rep. Jerry Nadler stated during an NPR interview that he was supporting "the position of Brit Tzedek on a negotiated solution for two states, Israel and Palestine, because it would be our best possibility of long-term peace and security in that area."

Rep. Charles Rangel met with a delegation at Brit Tzedek's NYC office during which he offered to facilitate closer relationships between Brit Tzedek and members of the Black Congressional caucus.

Boston Chapter Organizes Election Forum The Boston chapter organized, "Election '08: The Presidential Candidates' Vision of U.S. Foreign Policy" held at Harvard Hillel on October 30th. Steve Grossman, former National Chair of the Democratic National Committee, spoke for Sen. Barack Obama and Kerry Healey, former Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor spoke for Sen. John McCain at this interactive event.



Six Years of Grassroots Power — Local and National Advocacy

By Diane Balser, Executive Director,
Brit Tzedek v'Shalom

Brit Tzedek can take great pride in the successful establishment of a national advocacy organization based in the American Jewish grassroots. We began at the height of the second Intifada, amid a groundswell of popular discontent among American Jews with the status quo in Israel and the Palestinian territories. We understood the need to build a uniquely American organization within the Jewish community around the issue of Israeli-Palestinian peace, and over the past six years — in the face of the enormous failures of Bush administration policies — we established a firmly-rooted Brit Tzedek presence in over 35 states, advocating within our community and in the halls of Congress.

This has not been easy. We have seen dramatic developments: the Geneva Accords, the Gaza withdrawal, the Second Lebanon War, the elections of Mahmoud Abbas and later Hamas, a major shift in Olmert's position on peace negotiations, increased settlement building, and the largely "hands-off the peace process" policy of the Bush administration.

And yet, by working from the ground up, we have extended our reach, organizing ever greater numbers of American Jews to encourage strong U.S. leadership in establishing a negotiated peace agreement and a viable Palestinian state alongside Israel. This success has a direct corollary in the success of President-elect Obama's campaign, and as we prepare to welcome a new Democratic Administration, we are perfectly positioned to build on our ties with the President-elect.

We will continue to build on the relationships with members of Congress we have cultivated — with key players as Sen. Nancy Pelosi, Sen. John Kerry, and White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel.

Americans made their choice for fresh policies in the Middle East. **Now it is time to act.**

Where Obama Stands on Israeli-Palestinian Peace Issues

The two-state solution Obama has shown real commitment to a negotiated, two-state solution. From his campaign website: "Obama and Biden... will make a sustained push — working with Israelis and Palestinians — to achieve the goal of two states, a Jewish state in Israel and a Palestinian state, living side by side in peace and security."

Role of the U.S. government in peace-making Obama has made it clear that he understands America's central role in the peace process, saying "diplomacy in the Middle East cannot be done on the cheap. Diplomacy is measured by patience and by effort. We cannot continue to have trips consisting of little more than photo ops.... Neither Israel nor the United States is served by this approach."

Priority of the conflict Speaking to the Jordanian press in July, he said: "My goal is to make sure that we work, starting from the minute I'm sworn into office, to try to find some breakthroughs." Obama believes, "we have a national-security interest in solving this... the status quo is unsustainable."

Jerusalem Obama has tried to hedge his bets on Jerusalem, telling AIPAC that "Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel, and it must remain undivided," and later clarifying that "it's going to be up to the parties to negotiate a range of these issues. And Jerusalem will be part of those negotiations."

Settlements Obama has called on Israel to "advance the cause of peace" by "refrain[ing] from building new settlements — as it agreed to with the Bush Administration at Annapolis."

Israeli security Obama has called Israel's security "paramount," but has also indicated that he conceives of security in other than strictly defensive terms. Speaking to a Jewish audience in Ohio, he spoke of the need for a functional Palestinian state, saying "that's in Israel's interest.... If you have a balkanized, unsustainable state, it will break down and we will be back in the same boat."

Hamas Obama has shown little flexibility regarding Hamas: "Since they are a terrorist organization, we should not be dealing with them until they recognize Israel, renounce terrorism, and abide by previous agreements."

Relationship between the conflict and regional stability "We've got to have an overarching strategy recognizing that all of these issues are connected. If we can solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, then that will make it easier for Arab states and the Gulf states to support us when it comes to issues like Iraq and Afghanistan. It will also weaken Iran... maybe at the same time peeling Syria out of the Iranian orbit."

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":

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

[continued from p. 2] Brit Tzedek activists took part in over 115 meetings on Capitol Hill, including eight with U.S. senators and nearly 20 with U.S. Representatives. The activists called on Congress to support the nascent diplomatic advances in the region, such as the Israel-Hamas ceasefire in Gaza and Israeli-Syrian peace talks. They also urged that the next President not repeat the mistakes of the current White House by waiting until the final year of his Administration to become actively engaged in the peace process, and they called upon Members to support efforts that encourage active engagement in Israeli-Palestinian and Arab-Israeli peacemaking from the very beginning of the next administration. *

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Happy Hannukah!

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