

B'nai B'rith Urges Stengthening Wall Between Church And State

WASHINGTON — Following a plenary session during which delegate after delegate passionately voiced their fear of a crumbling First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution B'nai B'rith International unanimously approved a resolution urging the strengthening of the wall between church and state.

The resolution, approved during the Jewish organization's convention here, opposes "all forms of organized prayer, religious exercises or Bible classes" in public schools; public funding or display of religious symbols on public property; the recently approved equal access law permitting student religious clubs to meet on school property; and attempts by public officials and church leaders to "link government to church and church to government" and to claim "God's authority" in political campaigns.

One convention delegate, who belongs to a lodge made up of Holocaust survivors, said, "When I came to the United States, the most important thing to me was the separation of church and state. Now, that is eroding, and it scares us."

B'nai B'rith President Gerald Kraft summarized the feeling of the more than 1,200 delegates when he stated, "We view with great apprehension the crumbling of the historic wall between church and state."

"Government," said the resolution, "must remain neutral in matters of religion. This neutrality is not intolerance, but is vital to the survival of a democratic society whose government does not burden its citizens with religious choices or doctrines. We reaffirm our view that separation of church and state is a fundamental precept of our constitutional government."

In a related resolution, the convention expressed similar concern over efforts in Israel to alter or reinterpret that nation's Law of Return. That law provides that any Jew has the right to live in Israel.

Declaring that it is "an integral part of the concept of Israel as a haven for Jews in distress and a home for all Jews who desire to live there," B'nai B'rith called on all political parties in Israel to reject outright any demand for change.

"Without that law -- or with an altered version of it -- Israel would lose part of its meaning and centrality of Jewish life," stated the resolution. "It would not be the same Israel. Nor would it be the same world Jewry."

"Making the Law of Return more exclusionary would also create new divisions and erect new barriers within world Jewry -- at a time when Jewish unity is indispensable."

In a resolution regarding another major issue, B'nai B'rith called for determined efforts to heal the wounds recently made between the black and Jewish communities. "For many years blacks and Jews have stood arm-in-arm in a coalition of conscience," B'nai B'rith said. "Together, we have marched against bigotry and together we have struggled for social justice." The resolution cited a

sharing of common values of compassion, justice and fairness and commitment to full employment, public education, human rights and constitutional guarantees that protect religious and racial minorities.

Hailing efforts by both groups for reconciliation, the organization declared that it is "determined to make every effort to revive and rejuvenate relations between the two communities" and urged their leaders "to condemn those who would divide us."

In another resolution, the convention also denounced violence advocated by a small minority of Jews -- "whose actions make them terrorists."

"Just as we reject the hatred and terrorism of extremist groups in the world, we condemn the hypocrisy of the zealots among us, who preach vengeance in the name of self-protection, and violence in the name of Biblical morality, as an insult to Jewish tradition, history and values."

In other resolutions, B'nai B'rith:

- * Requested that nations sending delegates to a conference of the International Parliamentary Union beginning Monday (Sept. 24) ask that a resolution by Kuwait be cancelled. If that fails, B'nai B'rith said, then nations should withdraw from the conference. The Kuwait resolution contains unsubstantiated allegations against Israel.

- * Expressed deep concern for the millions of people in Africa who have died as the result of drought, called on its members throughout the world to urge their governments to establish and intensify relief operations to alleviate the suffering.

- * Called upon the 48 governments where there are B'nai B'rith members to urge both the Soviet Union and Syria to permit their Jewish population to emigrate, without hindrance or penalty, "in accordance with the universal declaration of human rights and the international covenant on civil and political rights."

- * Noted the frequent attacks in the United Nations on Israel, attempting to make that nation a scapegoat for many of the world's ills and asked its leadership to alert their governments "to the corrosive effect" of these attacks.

We urge those nations which believe in human rights and the rule of law to fight this politicization and bigotry so that the U.N. can focus on the security, economic, and social problems it is uniquely designed to address."

- * Assailed desecrations and vandalism of houses of worship and the broadcasting of anti-Semitic and racist comments on radio and television.

- * Condemned efforts to bar Israeli teams in international sports competition.

- * Recommended a statement of principles on "the Jewish people, the Jewish state, and B'nai B'rith" that can guide and inspire greater achievements on behalf of Israel, unify the Jewish people and the centrality of Israel in their lives, preserve the identity of the Jewish people and protect Jewish rights everywhere.

- * Urged the U.S. government to increase its efforts to prosecute Nazi war criminals and to streamline laws dealing with their deportation "to achieve speedier justice."

- * Welcomed positive, new directions in U.S.-Israeli relations and urged that the U.S. move its embassy to Jerusalem "at the earliest appropriate time."

- * Expressed the hope that the U.S. continues to encourage Egypt to return its ambassador to Israel "and begin to act like a country truly at peace with its Jewish neighbor."

- * Reaffirmed its opposition to any direct talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization by U.S. government officials.

Hammer To Raise Soviet Jewry Plight At Meet With Chernenko

JERUSALEM (WNS) — American oil magnate and renowned art collector Armand Hammer will raise the plight of Soviet Jewry with President Konstantine Chernenko when he meets the Soviet leader in Moscow in a few days' time. He was asked to do so here in Jerusalem by Deputy Premier Yitzhak Shamir who spoke of the intensified persecution of Zionist activists and refuseniks in the USSR. Hammer, who spent

part of his early career in post-revolutionary Russia, is a persona grata with the Kremlin -- instead one of the few Western personalities of his stature and eminence who can claim this distinction.

He flew into Israel on his first-ever visit to the Jewish State, landing in his private jet at Atarot

Airport in Jerusalem. He is here to mark the opening at the Israel Museum of an exhibition of paintings from the Middle Ages to the present day taken from his extensive and outstanding art collection. The exhibition has been

on display in several other leading cities around the world.

During his brief visit, Hammer met with Premier Shimon Peres and called on his old friend former Premier Menachem Begin in Shaare Zedek hospital. Hammer also visited Hadassah Medical Center where he is to contribute substantively to cancer research, and attended a reception in his honor at the museum.



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