



May 9, 2010
25 Iyar 5770

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu
3 Kaplan St. Hakiryia
Jerusalem 91950
Israel

Dear Prime Minister Netanyahu,

Following our recent meetings in New York City with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Danny Ayalon and MK David Rotem, we are left with profound misgivings about the proposed Conversion Law. We share MK Rotem's desire to ease the bottleneck in the conversion process that affects thousands of *olim* from the former Soviet Union. It is our strong belief however, that this proposed legislation would not only fail to achieve his forecasted result, but will dangerously alter the Law of Return by consolidating conversion power in the hands of the Chief Rabbinate in ways that would be disastrous to the unity of the Jewish people.

By legislatively granting the power of conversion to the Chief Rabbinate exclusively, this bill explicitly connects conversion to a single religious stream. It does not recognize conversion via the streams that represent 85% of Diaspora Jewry. This message is inconsistent with the democratic ideals on which the State of Israel was founded. Furthermore, it will undoubtedly alienate many North American Jews from Israel widening an already precarious and growing rift that should concern us all.

We unambiguously reject the distinction between those who are born Jewish and those who choose to be Jewish spelled out in the proposed legislation. The "Who is a Jew" episode of the 1990's should remind us to be very cautious. Every time this issue arises, the unity of the Jewish people is harmed.

Israel faces a great many challenges at home and abroad. We are fully committed to a secure Israel, safe from the threats she courageously faces each day. Yet, the proposed conversion law offends with its disregard for any religious authority outside the Chief Rabbinate. As strongly as we support Israel, we oppose this law.

These sentiments, which we conveyed to Deputy Foreign Minister Ayalon and MK Rotem during their visit to New York, are fueled by our steadfast love and commitment to the people and State of Israel. Indeed, it is our very unwavering commitment to Israel as both a sovereign nation and a worldwide Jewish community that compels us to urge you, in the strongest terms, to oppose this dangerous bill and we encourage you to use your influence with your coalition partners to withdraw this bill.

Sincerely,



Mr. Jerry Silverman
President and CEO
Jewish Federations of North America



Rabbi Julie Schonfeld
Executive Vice President
Rabbinical Assembly



Rabbi Carl Sheingold
Executive Vice President
Jewish Reconstructionist Federation



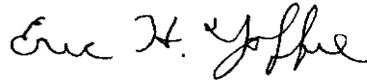
Rabbi Steven Fox
Executive Vice President
Central Conference of American Rabbis



Rabbi Steven Wernick
Executive Vice President
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism



Rabbi Richard Hirsh
Executive Director
Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association



Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie
President
Union for Reform Judaism