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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Reform Judaism is the official voice of the Union for Reform Judaism, linking the institutions and affiliates of Reform Judaism with every Reform Jew. *RJ* covers developments within our Movement while interpreting world events and Jewish tradition from a Reform perspective. Shared by 305,000 member households, *RJ* conveys the creativity, diversity, and dynamism of Reform Judaism.

DEAR READER

Give Israel's Arab Citizens Full Equality

Menachem Begin must be turning over in this grave.

The late Prime Minister and long-time leader of Israel's right-wing parties was an enthusiastic champion of Israel's Arab citizens. He viewed equality for Arab Israelis as a matter of principle: now that a Jewish state had at long last been created, it had a special responsibility to confer the same rights enjoyed by Israel's Jewish citizens on her Arab minority. He also knew that ending discrimination against Arab Israelis was in the nation's self-interest. Absent fair treatment, her Arab citizens would be radicalized, threatening Israel's security.

Unfortunately, today, 26 years after Begin left office, Arab citizens receive fewer government resources than do Jewish Israelis and suffer discrimination in housing, employment, and education. To make matters worse, last March Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu party became Israel's third largest party after running a hate-filled, demagogic campaign challenging the loyalty of Israel's Arab citizens.

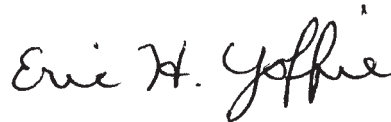
To be sure, the other side is not blameless. Arab Knesset members delight in provoking the Jewish majority. At times their provocations exceed all limits of decency, including expressing support for Israel's enemies in times of war—which drives many of Israel's Jewish voters into Lieberman's arms. Israel's mainstream parties have too often acquiesced in this process by remaining silent.

It is best not to exaggerate the importance of Lieberman's anti-Arab campaign. He received only 12–13% of the vote. At the same time, neither should he be ignored. The complex problem of majority-minority relations in Israel will not be resolved by simplistic and incendiary solutions that are both immoral and undemocratic, which is what Yisrael Beiteinu offers.

A sensible response would mean a different approach. It would mean extending a hand to Israel's Arab citizens by addressing their economic distress and appointing an Arab Israeli to serve in Israel's cabinet. And it would mean calling on all Israeli citizens, including Arabs and ultra-Orthodox Jews, to take on full responsibilities of citizenship, including mandatory national service. (Polls show that 74% of Arab Israelis support such service.)

Israel is a proud democracy in an authoritarian neighborhood where rogue states abound. It is time to realize the full potential of her democratic ideals by assuring full equality for her Arab citizens.

On an issue closer to home—a new vision for the Reform synagogue movement—I call your attention to my co-authored “Open Letter to the Reform Movement” on page 8 and thank you for your commitment to our mutual sacred quest.



Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie
President, Union for Reform Judaism

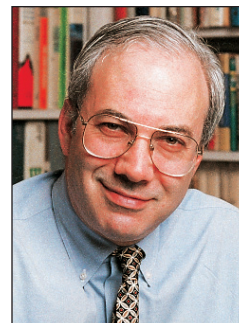


PHOTO BY HENRY GROSSMAN

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