



Speech at Rally against the “Nation State” Bill- Rabbi Gilad Kariv- President of the IMPJ- July 14th 2018

Next week the Jewish people will mark exactly 1948 years since the second destruction of Jerusalem. The historians of the time left us with powerful descriptions of the political and military struggle between the Roman Empire and the Jews who lived in this Land. But Jewish tradition has chosen to emphasize a different aspect. For our tradition, the destruction was first and foremost the result of the domination of the national agenda by a spirit of zealotry, in an age when previously marginal extremists moved to center stage. No less seriously, Jewish tradition suggests that moderate sages and leaders fell silent – precisely those who should have seen the writing on the wall, but through negligence, weakness of spirit, or a tendency to look the other way repeatedly allowed another red line to be crossed and another precedent to be set.

This evening, we declare that we will not let history repeat itself. We are not willing to remain silent as ill winds of zealotry, incitement, racism, and exclusion have shaped and twisted the character of Israeli society over recent years. We are not willing to accept a terrible process whereby everything that until a few years ago was considered extreme, beyond the pale, and absurd is now becoming the latest fashion in Israeli politics. We have a profound and sharp argument with public representatives who misuse Judaism and Zionism as tools to shape hatred and division. But our real quarrel is with those public representatives who know, deep down, that the Nation-State Law will be a stain on the Israeli statute book – yet remain silent. This evening, we say to them: Don't play your game of political poker at the expense of the values and character of Israeli society! Don't play your game at the expense of the hope of nurturing here a tolerant, inclusive, and generous society! Don't gamble away the most valuable coins of Israeli democracy! Don't cross this red line, after which you will only face demands to cross yet more red lines.

The Nation-State Law is contemptible. We can argue about specific wordings or throw a bit of sand into the deepest pits it creates in the soil of Israeli democracy – but none of that will alter its spirit. The spirit of the law is one of isolationism, insularity, and the construction of walls. This is a vindictive and mean spirit, a spirit of force and of sticking a finger in your fellow's eye. Seventy years ago, the nation's leaders sat down to draft the Declaration of Independence. In the midst of difficult and bloody days for all the inhabitants of this Land, they produced a document that seeks to look forward with hope, in the belief that a better reality can be created here – one of “complete equality of rights for all its citizens without distinction of religion, race, and sex.” In this reality, Jews and Arabs will “participate in the upbuilding of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship.” It is hardly surprising that unlike the



Basic Law: Human Dignity and Equality, this new Basic Law does not even mention the principles embodied in the Declaration of Independence.

The process of enactment of the Nation-Law has become an ongoing show in which its supporters are careful to recite Zionist slogans, hallmarks, and quotes. But the truth is that this law is nothing more than pseudo-Zionism. It is an empty shell, as if someone decided to take a flyer produced by a political party and turn it into a Basic Law and into a central bolt in Israel's constitutional structure.

The real goal of the law is to revive the public and political consciousness of the pre-state age. Its authors are not busy with the business of running a sovereign state, but seek to continue the struggle of the Hebrew Yishuv against dark internal and external forces. This process is not motivated by sentimental longing. A calculated attempt is being made here to exempt the State of Israel and Israeli society from the difficult challenges that face any modern, law-abiding, and advanced sovereign nation: The social reality; ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens and residents; relations between the majority and the minority; decent treatment of asylum seekers and refugees; relations between religion and state; and – of course – the desire to reach a reality of peace and agreement.

This proposed law is based on a stubborn refusal to accept that, after seventy years of independence, the task that faces us is to integrate Jewish nationhood with a thriving Israeli culture that profoundly recognizes the existence of a large and important minority in this land. This culture acknowledges the need to nurture coexistence and to protect and ensure the rights of every citizen. We want to bring our children up in a nation where Hebrew and Arabic are both official languages. We want to bring our children up in a country where people choose where to live without anyone inspecting their religion or national identity. We want to bring our children up in a country where alongside the Jewish festivals, other days are also celebrated reflecting the heritage of all the partners in Israeli society, as well as our joint heritage. It is certainly possible that it may take a long time to build this reality. But in the meantime, we bear an obligation to prevent the aggressive attempt to place an obstacle along the path we seek to travel together.

It isn't easy for us to gather here as battles rage not far from us. We offer the prayer that all the children of this Land will be able to sleep peacefully in their beds, will not be afraid to play outside, and will be able to dream of a future of security, calm, and hope.

Many years ago, a Hebrew poet wrote these words:

“Rejoice for I have faith in friendship
I'll find a heart – in this I've faith –
A heart that shares in all my hopes,
A heart that feels both joy and pain.

And I shall keep faith in the future,



Though the day be yet unseen
Surely it will come when nations
All live in blessed peace.”

This is our Nation-State Law: I shall keep faith in the future – though the day be yet unseen. Surely it will come when nations all live in blessed peace.”