

The Honorable Isaac Herzog
Leader of the Opposition
The Knesset
Jerusalem, Israel

July 12, 2018

Knesset Member Herzog:

We write to express our strong concerns about the Nation-State Bill, which would enshrine discrimination into Israel's basic laws.

Israel's Declaration of Independence states a clear vision for the democratic foundation of the state, including "it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex." We share President Rivlin's view that this bill is completely incompatible with that vision.

The defining characteristic of a modern democracy is its promise to protect the rights of all people. This bill would remove that democratic basis and give constitutional protection to policies that could discriminate against minorities, including women, Palestinian citizens, racial minorities, LGBT people, non-Orthodox Jews, Muslims, Druze, Christians, and others.

A woman must not be forced to the back of a bus anywhere in a democratic Israel. An LGBT Israeli must not be excluded from any part of public life or barred from living or working where they please. A Mizrahi Jew must not be denied housing because she is "incompatible" with the ethnic identity of a village. Any Jew must be allowed to pray at all of Judaism's holiest sites, regardless of her adherence to Orthodoxy. A Palestinian citizen must be respected and acknowledged as a minority nationality in the state, including respect for her native Arabic language. Muslims, Druze, Christians, and other religious minorities must not know exclusion and discrimination unbecoming a modern, democratic state.

As American Jews, a minority in our country, we know the value of a diverse and multicultural society. Our lives are enriched by participating in a civic and communal life that includes multitudes of peoples, religions, and cultures. We also know that this value can only be realized because our constitution guarantees that we share the same rights and freedoms as our fellow Americans.

As you transition to your new role as Chair of the Jewish Agency, please look beyond this political moment toward the future that lies ahead for Israel and all its people. Israel's founding vision provides a blueprint for its greatest potential legacy: a truly democratic state that protects the rights of all, and fulfills our right as Jews to self-determination.

Sincerely,

Ameinu
Americans for Peace Now

Aytzim's Green Zionist Alliance
Habonim Dror North America
Hashomer Hatzair North America
J Street
Keshet
National Council of Jewish Women
New Israel Fund
Reconstructing Judaism
Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
Right Now: Advocates for Asylum Seekers in Israel
T'ruah
Tivnu: Building Justice

CC:

The Honorable Shuli Moalem Refaeli
The Honorable Tzachi Hanegbi
The Honorable Yoel Hasson
The Honorable Jamal Zahalka
The Honorable Yoav Ben Tzur
The Honorable Orli Levi-Abekasis
The Honorable Eliezer Moses
The Honorable Micki Levi
The Honorable Robert Ilatov
The Honorable Roe Folkman
The Honorable Ilan Gilon