



July 14, 2010

Take action now!

Please make your voice heard to stop a bill in the Israeli Knesset that could prevent some Diaspora Jews from gaining automatic Israeli citizenship as immigrants.

→ Urge PM Netanyahu to Halt Conversion Bill

On July 11, 2010, Knesset member David Rotem of the *Yisrael Beiteinu* party advanced a bill that proposes revising the Law of Return. The bill has stirred a deep sense of concern among Diaspora Jews because it gives the Orthodox-run Chief Rabbinate full control over conversions in Israel, urging that any convert "accepts the yoke of *mitzvot* according to *halacha*." It carries the potential effect of threatening to delegitimize those who converted to Judaism through the Conservative and Reform movements and precludes conferring citizenship under the Law of Return to those who did not qualify for such status on prior visits.

Changing the 62-year agreement over the Law of Return could drive a deep wedge between the Jewish State and Diaspora Jews, damage the Diaspora-Israel relationship, and create important long-term impacts. It could significantly affect the ability to connect and inspire varying parts of our community around *Clal Yisrael*.

The Knesset Law Committee approved the bill on first reading on July 11, and sent it to the full Knesset plenum, where it requires three readings and approval before becoming law.

The Jewish Federations of North America and the Jewish Agency for Israel, along with representatives of the liberal religious streams, as well as the Masorti Foundation for Conservative Judaism in Israel have launched major advocacy campaigns to prevent the measure from advancing.

These campaigns include sending Prime Minister Netanyahu letters and e-mails urging him (and members of his *Likud* party) to speak out publicly against the proposed bill. Until now Netanyahu has not done so.

PLEASE ADD YOUR VOICE!

[Click here](#) to send an e-mail to Prime Minister Netanyahu on the conversion bill (using the sample letter below or an edited version).

Sample letter

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

I am writing to you regarding the controversial conversion bill currently before the Knesset.

The language used in this bill is highly problematic. This bill raises issues about the Chief Rabbinate having full authority over conversions, and includes new language about the stringent commitment to *halacha*. Finally, it changes the 62-year agreement over the Law of Return, which could in turn drive a deep wedge between the Jewish State and Diaspora Jews. This could significantly affect our ability to connect and inspire varying parts of our community around *Clal Yisrael*.

I know you are aware of the deep sense of concern this proposal has stirred among Diaspora Jews. If successful, this bill will damage the Diaspora-Israel relationship and create significant long-term impacts. We urge you and members of your *Likud* party to speak out against this legislation now, before it proceeds further.

I hope you will show your concern for the unity of the Jewish People and work with the Knesset and the leadership of the Jewish Diaspora to amend the bill in a way that is acceptable to Jews across the world.

With respect,



The conversion bill demystified

[Click here](#) to view this July 13, 2010 detailed analysis of the conversion bill in *Haaretz*.

Background information from The Jewish Federations of North America:

There have been concerns articulated about a proposed bill in Israel's Knesset amending Israel's Law of Return. One proposed change could affect those who convert to Judaism after spending time in Israel, and potentially prevent them from immigrating under the Law of Return and gaining automatic Israeli citizenship. The bill also, for the very first time, gives the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate authority over conversions in Israel, something that could well alienate the 85% of North American Jews who are not Orthodox.

Representatives from JFNA and the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) met this winter in the Knesset with the bill's sponsor, MK David Rotem of the Yisrael Beiteinu Party, and delivered a concerted and forceful message that, as Diaspora Jewry's representatives, we wish to engage in discussions on any such initiatives before the law is changed.

MK Rotem pledged no changes would occur without our consultation. Rotem and former Israel Ambassador to the U.S. Danny Ayalon later met with Diaspora Jewish groups in the U.S., including Ayalon with JFNA, to reiterate these promises.

This past week Rotem suddenly advanced a new, even more troubling amendment, without consulting with JFNA or JAFI. The new changes would give "authority" to the Orthodox-run Chief Rabbinate in Israel to carry out all conversions and says a convert can only be recognized if one "accepts the yoke of mitzvot according to halacha" (as defined by the Chief Rabbinate).

Since these developments occurred, our leadership told Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Knesset leaders, and Rotem that these latest proposed changes would "drive a wedge" between Israel and the Diaspora and cause "significant damage" to the Diaspora-Israel relationship. JFNA and JAFI have delivered a strongly worded letter to this effect to the prime minister and have met with Knesset members this week to underscore that message.

These changes would potentially affect a broad swath of Diaspora Jewry, and also make a theological and ideological statement about the more liberal Jewish movements to which most Diaspora Jews belong. JFNA and JAFI have issued public statements to this effect and spoken out to the Israeli press.

While our leadership has been advocating in the halls of the Knesset, we need your help to send an even louder message to Prime Minister Netanyahu.

On July 13, 2010, the 125 members of the JFNA Campaign Chairs & Directors Mission now visiting Israel also met with Israel's President, Shimon Peres, about this important issue. Peres called for greater dialogue on the proposed bill so that discussions embrace both Diaspora and Israeli Jews ([click here for JFNA's briefing with his remarks](#)).

→ **Respond to the *Action Alert***

The ***Action Alert*** is a newsletter designed to educate the Jewish community. This newsletter does not necessarily represent the views of the JCRC or the Greater Miami Jewish Federation. To respond to the ***Action Alert***, contact [Lori Dearman](mailto:LDearman@gmjf.org) at LDearman@gmjf.org.



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