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Rabbis for Religious Freedom & Equality in Israel



“The State of Israel... will guarantee freedom of religion and conscience...”
Israel's Declaration of Independence (May 1948)

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Editorial

December 21, 2015

Dear Friends

Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi David Lau's hypocritical admonition to Minister Naphtali Bennett last week runs deeper than first appearances, and has stirred a significant controversy. The demand that Israel's government officials seek rabbinic clearance prior to fulfilling portions of their appointed tasks reeks of the assumption that Israel must be based not only on halakhah, but specifically a single interpretation that prevents free religious expression. Not only does such a demand transgress against a Supreme Court decision, but, more grievously, denies the promise of Israel's Declaration of Independence:

*THE STATE OF ISRAEL
will be open for Jewish*

Discuss this and other issues with fellow RRFEI members in the network's new Facebook group by clicking [HERE!](#)

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Responses to Chief Rabbi Lau's publicly disdainful anti-pluralism

Sources in English and Hebrew



Friends, we assume you are aware of the public rabbinic debate that ensued following Chief Rabbi Lau's admonishment of Minister Bennett for visiting a Conservative day school in Manhattan. Rabbi Uri Regev has written about it in the Jerusalem Post and the LA Jewish Journal, and many other responses to Rabbi Lau have been coming out on a nearly daily basis. Below, you'll find listed some of

immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles ... it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture...

The backlash provides further acknowledgment of the growth not only of the crisis in Israel's vision, but of the opposition to the battle for absolute control that is being waged within Israel and among the international Jewish community. Our obligation is nothing less than to ensure that Israel becomes a democratic and Jewish homeland for k'lal Yisrael.

Please take advantage of the articles, and let us know how you use them, by responding at:

organizers@RRFEI.org.

Also, if you know of any other responses or related sources, please send us the corresponding links to add to the [resource section of the RRFEI website](#).

B'yedidut,

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the key arguments that this encounter has raised.

We believe that you may be interested in seeing actual rabbinic pronouncements on both sides of the issue, which may not all be readily available to you in the USA. These are available to you on the <http://rrfei.org/> website, including:

- [Rabbi Ya'akov Ariel, Chief Rabbi of Ramat Gan & former President of Tzohar.](#)
- [Rabbi Gilad Kariv, Executive Director of the Israel Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism.](#)
- [Rabbi Benny Lau, Rabbi of Jerusalem's Ramban Synagogue.](#)
- [Rabbi Mordechai Neugroschel, popular ultra-Orthodox lecturer.](#)
- [Rabbi Uri Regev, Head of Hiddush.](#)
- [And others...](#)

As you read through these responses, you may consider the following:

1. The contradiction between Lau's message, which delegitimizes Conservative and Reform Judaism, expecting Ministers in the Israeli Cabinet to be guided by the religious prohibition, per the Chief Rabbi's view, that granting legitimacy to non-Orthodox Judaism is forbidden; and PM Netanyahu's recent statements about his inclusive approach to the Diaspora's diverse Jewish scene, along with his commitment to ensuring that all Jews, regardless of denomination, feel at home in Israel.
2. The chief rabbi, as an official of the State of Israel, disregarded the limitations set by Israeli law and the civil courts, which forbid interference by the chief rabbis in the conduct of state officials. This raises the larger issue of the lack of compliance and respect on the part of the state rabbinate towards civil law and the courts that officially empower it, threatening serious erosion of the rule of law in Israel.
3. Lau's hypocrisy in attempting to make a distinction between a religious prohibition, per his view, regarding the presence of Israeli officials at Reform and Conservative institutions due to their deviation from Orthodox norms and traditions, while at the same time visiting pluralistic day schools himself, where egalitarian prayer services and non-Orthodox rabbis among the faculty are celebrated. How can Lau expect the public to assume that his visits did not accord any legitimacy to these pluralistic and egalitarian practices?
4. While the chief rabbis in recent decades have been wholly

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associated with ultra-Orthodox Judaism, of great importance is the fact that Rabbi Lau's admonishment has now been subscribed to by additional important rabbinic figures who are associated with the Zionist sector within Orthodoxy, such as the Chief Rabbi of Ramat Gan (former Tzohar president) and the Chief rabbi of Safed. This is significant because of trends within Orthodoxy today, which make the former dividing lines blurry, and indicate that there are fundamentalist extremist tendencies growing within Zionist Orthodoxy. This is not merely with regard to non-Orthodoxy, but also regarding matters of great importance such as women's rights and attitudes towards non-Jews, as well as others. At same time, it is clear that there is a growing openness and inclusiveness in certain circles of Zionist Orthodoxy such as in the case of Rabbi Benny Lau.

Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel represents a broad spectrum of Jewish belief and practice, and champions the values of religious freedom and equality fundamental to World Jewry, in partnership with Hiddush for the realization of these principles in Israel and the Diaspora.

Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel

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