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Conservative Rabbis Call Out Chief Rabbi for Divisive Comments

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NEW YORK – Israel's Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi David Lau has criticized Bayit Yehudi chairman and Education Minister Naftali Bennett's December 1 visit to the Solomon Schechter School of Manhattan. In response to the Chief Rabbi's insulting and inaccurate comments about the Conservative/Masorti movement, the Rabbinical Assembly, the international association of Conservative/Masorti rabbis, issued the following statement:

Conservative Jews make up nearly one-fifth of the American Jewish population, a number that holds steady across generations, according to the recent Pew Study. The data also show that 98 percent of self-identifying Conservative Jews are 'proud' to be Jewish, 93 percent feel that 'being Jewish' is 'important' to their lives, and 90 percent regard Israel as 'an important part of being Jewish.' Thirty percent of eligible children from Conservative homes are currently enrolled in day school such as the outstanding school that Minister Bennett visited. We are a stream that engages our brethren and keeps our congregants and peers involved in Jewish life, both inside and outside the synagogue. Chief Rabbi Lau's recent comment that the Conservative movement 'distances Jews from the path of the Jewish people' is not only misinformed but offensive.

Minister Bennett not only serves as Education Minister for ALL of Israel's citizens but also as Minister of Jerusalem and Diaspora Affairs, charged to reach out to ALL the world's Jews. We encourage him to continue such visits, embracing all Jews as we embrace Israel and our shared heritage. We echo the sentiment expressed in a statement from the Minister's office, that 'public leaders in Israel need to draw Jews close and not to excommunicate them.' Rabbi Lau should follow in Minister Bennett's footsteps and visit more such schools rather than criticizing others for doing so.

As Rabbi Lau speaks out on threats to the Jewish future, he must first look at how his ignorant and narrow-minded remarks such as these are alienating young Jews in the Diaspora. Only through engaging the Diaspora community worldwide will we maintain our strength as a Jewish people. As Hillel taught in Avot 1:12, '[love] your fellow creatures and [attract] them to the study of Torah.'

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