



January 1, 2018

Dear Friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

On December 6th, President Trump officially recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and announced the plan to move the United States embassy to Jerusalem. The decision was met with a diverse range of reactions, oscillating from cheerful joy to violent rejection.

It doesn't come as a surprise that our neighbors in the Middle East are not happy – to say the least – with President Trump's move. Those who openly advocate for the destruction of Israel see in President Trump's affirmation another excuse to justify their violent agenda. More moderate Arab countries, some of them temporary allies of Israel on particular issues, also opposed President Trump's move, as well as the majority of the European countries. Now, given the rise of anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli feelings in most European countries, we shouldn't be surprised by their reaction. And the same, of course, goes for the United Nations, whose record on Israel has been shameful, to say the least.

President Trump's decision, however, awoke mixed feelings among Israel lovers as well, including many Jews throughout the world and a few in our own congregation.

Most of these Jews who have expressed their apprehension at President Trump's decision to officially recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, believe Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the Jewish State and they are strong supporters of Israel. Some of them, however, claim that the time was not right, that it was not necessary to "rock the boat," that both President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu are using this move to politically divert attention from their own domestic challenges, that this move will isolate Israel and the United States even more, etc.

While I am not a political analyst, I can relate to some of the above arguments. I did speak with some Israeli colleagues and friends, who are also concerned about the repercussions of President Trump's move.

And yet, after all is said and done, I went home last December 6th, turned the TV on, and watched, filled with emotion, President Trump's announcement officially recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and announcing the plans to move the United States embassy to Jerusalem:

"Therefore, I have determined that it is time to officially recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. While previous presidents have made this a major campaign promise, they failed to deliver. Today, I am delivering. Israel is a sovereign nation with the right like every other sovereign nation to determine its own capital. Acknowledging this as a fact is a necessary condition for achieving peace."

One hundred years ago, Lord Balfour issued the following declaration:

"His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object."

While we don't know how popular Lord Balfour or "His Majesty" were in Great Britain in November of 1917, we do know that "this formal recognition" went a long way, so much so, that the Balfour Declaration was even referred to in Israel's Declaration of Independence.

Likewise, I believe I was witnessing a historic moment last December 6th, when I heard President Trump's announcement. As religious Jews, we have put Zion in the center of our prayers for over two thousand years. As political Jews, we have demanded this recognition since Israel's Declaration of Independence. We finally got it.

Yes, there are uncertainties, and we should all pray for peace and tranquility. Having a son living in Jerusalem, and both parents living 10 minutes away from the Lebanese border, the prospect of violence in Israel is a source of real concern. However, now is the time, I believe, to do what the main leading party and the main opposition party in Israel did: to rejoice over this important milestone, without underestimating its importance, praying that peace will eventually be achieved, not from a position of weakness but from a position of strength. As King David so well expressed it 3000 years ago in the Book of Psalms: (Psalms 29:11): *"Hashem will give strength to His people, Hashem will bless His people with peace."*

From my heart,

Rabbi Manes Kogan