



August 28, 2009

Honorable Benjamin Netanyahu
Office of the Prime Minister of Israel
Jerusalem, Israel

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

When religious extremes control political life in a country we, and you, deplore it and do not hesitate to point out that such behavior is antithetical to democratic values. When we, and you, see such behavior in Israel, we must do no less. Indeed, it is perhaps incumbent on us, and you, to do more.

Your Minister for Religious Affairs, Yaacov Margi, recently was quoted extensively in the Jerusalem Post. His remarks were outrageous, highly offensive to the majority of Jews throughout the world and clearly not reflective of a country born of and imbued with a democratic spirit.

According to Minister Margi, only those who embrace his definition of Orthodoxy are entitled to the benefit of assistance from the Government of Israel. We do not quarrel with Minister Margi's right to determine his own personal standards, but he has no right to allocate public funds in a way which is dismissive of and objectionable to worldwide Jewry.

Particularly as we approach Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and rabbis and congregational leaders throughout the world will be speaking to their congregations about Israel, we need to have a clear statement from you that the policy of your government is not as Minister Margi states and that you and your entire government are committed to assuring fair and equal treatment for the major recognized streams of Jewish life. Indeed, in that regard, we also call to your attention a recent public opinion poll conducted by Keevoon Research Strategy and Communications. When the Israeli public was asked if Masorti and Reform streams should receive from your government equal status and funding to Orthodox streams and their rabbis, 54% said yes and only 36% opposed.

In order to give you the opportunity to respond, we will not for a few days release this letter to the press or distribute it to Masorti/Conservative congregations around the world. But we do expect to hear back from you very promptly.

Respectfully,

The Rabbinical Assembly

Rabbi Jeffrey Wohlberg
President

Rabbi Julie Schonfeld
Executive Vice President

Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt
Director of Israel Policy

**United Synagogue of
Conservative Judaism**

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**World Council of Conservative/Masorti
Synagogues (Masorti Olami)**

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