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12 Cheshvan 5778

October 31, 2017

Malcolm Hoenlein, Executive Vice Chairman
Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations

Dear Mr. Hoenlein,

The Rabbinic Board members of the Coalition for Jewish Values (CJV) were saddened and distressed to learn that a board member of the Association of Reform Zionists of America (ARZA), Shoshana Dweck, was reported to have likened the Israeli government and traditional Jews to white supremacists of the early South. According to the New York Times of this morning, she told Israeli Minister Tzachi Hanegbi that "it was never about a seat at a lunch counter, or a seat on the bus," to underscore the notion that non-Orthodox Jews in Israel are "second-class."

There is nothing "second-class" about prayer space for alternative services that vastly exceeds its usage. While the space for traditional prayer was filled beyond capacity on multiple occasions during the recent holiday season, the *Ezrat Yisrael* section stood mostly or entirely empty.

To characterize Israelis as racists plays directly into the hands of the anti-Semites of today. It also appears to specifically violate a Statement on Public Discourse adopted in 1995 by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, including ARZA, which warns that "those from all sides of the spectrum who engage in verbal violence, demeaning characterizations and other excesses violate basic Jewish tenets as well as standards of decency while endangering the interests of the community."

This morning we sent an urgent letter to Rabbi Josh Weinberg, President of ARZA, asking him to dissociate ARZA from Dweck's inflammatory statement or call upon her to retract it. There has been no response, while this demeaning characterization — that which the Conference of Presidents acknowledges violates basic Jewish tenets and standards of decency — hangs out there in the media, doing further damage.

For this reason, we request that you urgently consider a statement of censure on behalf of the Conference of Presidents, that all member organizations know that intolerance will not be tolerated, from any side.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pesach Lerner".

Rabbi Pesach Lerner
President