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November 26, 2019

The Honorable Andy Levin
and 105 cosignatories
The United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Levin,

Representing over 1000 traditional Orthodox rabbis in matters of public policy, we write to express grave concern regarding the letter you sent to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, calling for a reversal of his recognition of the legality of Jewish settlement in Judea and Samaria. The letter appears to take a consistently hostile position towards the sole reliably democratic nation and US ally in the Middle East.

Your letter incorrectly describes the area of Judea and Samaria as “occupied” under the Fourth Geneva Convention. In fact, it was voluntarily ceded by the United Kingdom and illegally seized by Jordan in 1948. UN Resolution 242 states that Israel is expected to withdraw from only part of territories that changed hands in 1967, and only in the context of a lasting peace agreement with full recognition of Israel’s sovereignty and legitimacy. The Palestinian Authority was created to fulfill that latter obligation, yet the Palestinian Central Council has called for revocation of any such recognition, Mahmoud Abbas “blesses” bloodshed, and Gaza is ruled by an explicitly genocidal terrorist organization that calls for the destruction of Israel and murder of its (Jewish) inhabitants.

The letter also states that it was wrong to move the US Embassy to Jerusalem “outside of a negotiated agreement.” This statement runs contrary to US law – specifically, the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995, passed by Congress with overwhelming support from both parties. That Act states that moving the Embassy requires no international agreement, but simply recognizes that Jerusalem is Israel’s capital – and that Jews have lived in Jerusalem for 3000 uninterrupted years, save brief periods after massacres and ethnic cleansing. Many of the “Arab” homes in East Jerusalem still have notches in their stone doorposts in which Jewish *mezuzot* once rested. Is it truly appropriate to claim that in this case, and this case alone, a nation must receive approval from its enemies before identifying its capital?

It is also incorrect to associate Jewish settlement with demolition of “Palestinian homes.” In actuality, homes – whether Jewish or Arab – are destroyed only when constructed illegally, or if found to have harbored a terrorist. There is abundant room in Judea and Samaria for

people to reside there in peace – the entirely-new Arab city of Rawabi is home to over 4000, and is still under construction with active support from Israel.


And finally, your letter condemns the Trump Administration for withholding aid to the Palestinian Authority and Hamas-controlled Gaza. This is, once again, to criticize the Administration for following US law – namely the Taylor Force Act of 2018, and the Anti-Terrorism Clarification Act of 2018. To reverse this would return to a situation in which US tax dollars are spent to encourage terrorist atrocities committed against Israeli civilians and even American tourists – such as US Army Officer Taylor Force.

It is regrettable that you signed a letter that undermines America's most steadfast ally, a country which has always sought peace, yet which overwhelmingly endorsed the move of the US Embassy to Jerusalem, recognition of its sovereignty over the Golan Heights, and Mr. Pompeo's recent declaration that Jewish settlements in Judea are legal.

We would be happy to meet with any or all signatories to speak about these issues and more, regarding Israel and its neighbors. But we must ask that your letter be withdrawn in its current form, as it could do great harm to Israel's security and sovereignty, and injures rather than enhances the likelihood of establishing a just and lasting peace.

Yours Sincerely,


Rabbi Pesach Lerner
President


Rabbi Yaakov Menken
Managing Director