

What Next

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Mr. President, the obvious question is “So what next?” In assessing the state of the Jewish people in its entirety, the number one thing on all our minds is obviously how to enhance the security of both Israel and Jews around the globe.

You, the people sitting in this room, play a huge role in enhancing Israel’s security. The issue of the Diaspora communities’ safety, however, is a little more diffuse than that of Israeli security, but we are beginning to form a clearer picture of the power that the Diaspora brings to bear. With respect to the hard power/soft power equation noted in the report, we normally think of the IDF as the hard power, while we in the Diaspora sometimes see ourselves as part of the soft power base. Yet in light of the challenges we are currently facing, we have to ratchet up the level of security of Jewish communities around the globe, particularly in North America. The Presidents’ Conference and the United Jewish Communities have launched a program called ‘Scan’ (SCN, Secure Community Network) which is dedicated to protecting Jewish institutions in the US and developing closer relationships with government authorities. Scan is a direct result of the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute’s work, and we have already made some tangible progress towards implementing their valuable policy recommendations.

To maintain the Jewish Nature of Israel

The united effort to maintain the Jewish nature of Israel is not just a demographic issue, for there are educational implications as well.

Likewise, the future of Jerusalem must be viewed as a global Jewish concern, and not an issue that is left to the discretion of Israel.

We need to adjust to global shifts in a creative fashion. For instance, the intentions of various multi-cultural policies that render governments either more or less receptive to differences in their respective societies is of particular concern to Diaspora leaders. Some of this plays out in the manner in which immigration policy is pursued. The US, for example, has just tightened its immigration policy. Alternatively, when I was in Berlin earlier this year, the German minister in charge of social welfare talked about how Germany is relatively neglectful of the notion that there are 'others' in its midst. This has led to feelings of resentment and pressures on society that are being vented in the form of attacks on Jews. France is dealing with these same issues, and there were even some outbreaks of anti-Semitism in Canada. To top it all off, we are contending with the general phenomenon of globalization. We need to do more together, as a global Jewish people, if we are going to address the kinds of concerns that prof. DellaPergola listed beforehand.

A Stronger Emphasis on the Future

We are going to have to invest more in Jewish education everywhere, including Israel. If trend lines continue in the same direction, we cannot assume that our children and the children of Israel are going to be inculcated with a sense of common identity. It cannot be taken for granted. We are not where we were when the State was founded, when everybody believed that they are on the same page. We are no longer on that same page today. Therefore, I believe that we must become activists and consciously push the idea of mutual responsibility throughout the Jewish world. Jewish leaders have to

find a way to harness the new world of cyber space in a manner that is conducive to the fostering of cohesion and learning.

This brings us to the issue of money. Many of our folks at the Institute believe that the objectives to which the Jewish people's resources are allocated should be restructured with a significantly stronger emphasis on the future, rather than meeting the needs of the present, no matter how pressing they may seem. In other words, there are relatively limited resources; and if we have to hedge our bets, we should lean more towards the future than the present. Some have gone so far as to say that money that we now spend in Israel should be invested in areas that are targeted towards securing its future as a Jewish state, as opposed to a compassionate state. What I'm trying to say is that the compassion should be provided by the citizens of Israel, while the Diaspora should be focusing on Israel's future as a Jewish state. This is a policy shift with weighty implications. Like I said, you can either walk away from it, or you can sit down and consider its ramifications.

Alternatively, Israeli decision makers should take into account the needs and constraints of Jews living outside its borders. I am not just talking about political decisions. Decisions are constantly being made that have serious implications on whether Diaspora communities will thrive or decline.

Finally, some have called for the establishment of a formal representative body of the Jewish people and are even considering the possibility of conferring it with a constitutional advisory standing in Israel. Since we are all Jewish princes and princesses, they seem to be proposing something on the order of the British House of Lords.

I leave it to you to contemplate who will be crowned and sit in this House, but it is a serious consideration and I do not wish

to make light of it. Regardless of the format that the House will ultimately take, the Jewish world needs an accepted channel for conveying the opinions and concerns of the Diaspora communities to the Israeli government, primarily on questions that impact the Jewish people at large.