

**Extreme right-wing government set to rule Israel-Palestine**  
**How do we react?**

**8<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

The alliance of Likud, Religious Zionism, Shas and United Torah Judaism have won the majority of seats in Israel's 120 seat Knesset. Headed by Benjamin Netanyahu this coalition will likely make up the next government. Judging by their election manifestos and statements the new ruling coalition represent a sharp turn to the right for the Jewish state. Values such as tolerance, inclusiveness, equality, plurality and justice are not found in this lot's ideology. The State of Israel will be ruled by ultra-Nationalist, racist, homophobic religious fundamentalists with little sympathy or actual antipathy towards minorities and those who do not observe their approved version of Judaism. Democracy itself will come under attack and the potential for violence instigated and encouraged by such far-right extremist ideologies and policies cannot be overstated.

An important question for our South African Jewish community, and indeed all Diaspora communities, is how to react to the increased acceptance, legitimisation and political power of openly racist and homophobic political parties and the politicians who represent them.

South Africans know first-hand the irreparable damage and pain caused by a racist, supremacist government and corrupt political officials. South Africa's democracy was the victory of a violent, hard-fought struggle, and its fragility was recently revealed in the findings of the Zondo Commission of Inquiry into State Capture. Democracy and democratic institutions, as much as something to be cherished, require active protection and defence against those who try to weaken and abuse it. Our South African Jewish community has a moral and ethical responsibility to not stand idly by as the Israeli government turns its back on our Jewish values of justice and equality.

As South Africans, we benefit from the citizenship rights enshrined in our constitution and are protected from ethnic, religious and many other forms of discrimination. This is increasingly no longer the case in Israel. Anticipate individual and civil rights to be further eroded and diluted for all Israeli citizens under the incoming government.

It is time to re-calibrate our communal attitude towards the State of Israel. We understand that around 50% of Israelis did not vote for this illiberal coalition. Israel needs our support to resist bigotry and violence and encourage and support those who advocate for a shared society dedicated to peace, security and a flourishing of the original vision of equality and justice as enunciated in the Declaration of Independence as follows:- *The State of Israel would "be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex"*

The State of Israel has yet to attain these original worthy aspirations.

However we have never been further from them than present times.

עוד לו עבדה תקוותינו – We have still not lost hope.

## Appeal

The Jewish Democratic Initiative calls on all South African Jews and Jewish institutions – and particularly the Board of Deputies and the Zionist Federation – to join international Jewry and publicly condemn the Religious Zionist Party’s inclusion in a ruling coalition government. If we really believe there can be no space for hatred in South African and Israeli society, we must explicitly and forcefully reject the vile politics currently represented by the Religious Zionist Party.

## Who are we referring to and why?

### **Ben Gvir**

Itamar Ben-Gvir, the leader of the far right Otzma Yehudit party, is a disciple of the notorious racist leader Rabbi Meir Kahane. Ben-Gvir also considers the mass murderer Baruch Goldstein a hero for massacring 29 Palestinians at worship. He has a history of criminal convictions for racist incitement he threatened violence against Yitzhak Rabin a week before his assassination, and he has called repeatedly for the expulsion of Arab citizens of Israel. As he ran for Knesset Ben-Gvir “moderated” his message. He now proposes expulsion for anyone “disloyal” to Israel.

### **Smotrich**

Bezalel Smotrich is the leader of the far right Religious Zionist party. He recently proposed a law that would impose full Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank, as well as ban Arab political parties. In addition, he opposes civil rights for the LGBTQ community and is committed to banning mixed faith relationships. He was quoted as stating he is a “proud homophobe”.