



JDI Welcomes the New Government – Hope for Meaningful Change

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The Jewish Democratic Initiative welcomes, with cautious optimism, the new Israeli governing coalition. This “government of change” sees the ousting of Benjamin Netanyahu and the end to Israel’s political paralysis. Though this government may not represent the radical shift in policy and ideology towards which JDI advocates, we hope it is at least a step forward.

Throughout his decade-plus in power, Benjamin Netanyahu was responsible for the division of Israeli society; the degradation of Israeli democracy and rule of law; support for widespread illegal-settlement expansion; continued oppression and subjugation of Palestinians; populism; fearmongering; personal corruption and incitement of violence against Jews and Palestinians. While he did not invent these ideas and tactics, he unabashedly promoted them within Israeli society, and on the global stage. The damage to Israelis, Palestinians and Jews around the world is difficult to overstate.

This incoming government could not only mark the end of the divisive, vitriolic and extremist ‘Bibi years’ but also the end of an era in South African Jewish communal culture where the bad behaviour of the self-proclaimed leader of the Jews has been shamelessly excused.

Despite the global sigh of relief, we understand that Bibi’s defeat is neither the end of his influence over Israeli society, nor will it necessarily mark the start of a large-scale democratization of the State of Israel. Naftali Bennet, seen as Netanyahu’s protégé, has consistently presented himself as an even more hard-line, pro-settlement, anti-Palestinian, right-wing alternative. Positively however, Bennet’s party holds just 6 seats in the coalition that is mostly made up of more moderate parties.

Though many are anxious about this coalition’s internal rifts, we note with particular optimism the inclusion of voices that represent progressive, inclusive and democratically aligned Jews. We hope that these coalition partners will make strides to re-establish trust between diaspora Jewry and the Israeli government, and that they will heed the voices of Jews worldwide calling for an end to Occupation and violence, and a renewed dedication towards equality, peace and reconciliation within Israel-Palestine.

As the Jewish Democratic Initiative, our mission has never been more important: to honour the long tradition of South African Jews’ involvement in the continuous struggle for human rights and justice; reconnecting our community to these traditions and ideas by word and deed. We further commit to inform and educate our community around issues of democracy in South Africa and Israel-Palestine; to encourage the South African government, with its own experience of peace and reconciliation, to provide leadership and guidance to both the State of Israel and the Palestinian people; and to strengthen our relationships with all those around the world committed to working for democracy.