

The Kineret Declaration

TO THE EDITORS:

After reading the Kineret Declaration, appended to “Miracle on the Sea of Galilee” (Editorial, *Azure* 13, Summer 2002), I was dismayed that such an impressive array of Israeli political, cultural, and intellectual figures—including Yoram Hazony of the Shalem Center—should endorse an agreement that, contrary to its purported commitment to and pride in the State of Israel’s democratic nature, seems rather a document of nervous self-justification.

The American Declaration of Independence opens by affirming the truths it holds to be self-evident. But immediately following its ringing phrases on political freedom is an exhaustive indictment of the king of Great Britain for preventing the American people from attaining those rights. The colonists understood that political freedom must be won from those who would deny it to them. They could not have hoped to achieve their own high objectives without demanding recognition and mutual respect from others.

Not so the Kineret Declaration. The title of Article 6, for example,

asserts that “The State of Israel Is Committed to the Pursuit of Peace.” What does it mean for a democracy to make such a statement? No democracy has ever sought out war, much less the state of the Jewish people. One must wonder if this assertion is indeed made on behalf of the state’s citizenry, or is instead an answer to the unfounded charges, made by hostile Arab parties, as to Israel’s less-than-noble intentions. Nor will moral preening for the sake of Israel’s fellow democracies serve any good purpose: The very act of making such a statement only reinforces doubts about the state’s obsequiousness and failure of nerve. The declaration’s authors would do far better to maintain that the State of Israel demands unconditional recognition and peaceful coexistence, as is the right of every member of the United Nations. As there is no doubt of Israel’s desire for peace, the real question this or any other such declaration should pose is whether Israel intends to demand anything from those who seek war, and who have turned the war against the Jewish people into the purpose of their existence.

An even more misguided statement is that which is made in Article 5,

“The State of Israel Respects the Rights of the Arab Minority.” As the only democratic state in a determinedly anti-democratic region, the issue is surely not the state’s proven respect for the rights of the Arab minority. Rather, it is the state’s justifiable expectation that the Arab minority will respect the rights of the Jewish majority. Yet even a statement that reflects this essential reciprocity would still be injudicious, for it remains an answer to an unsubstantiated charge as opposed to a necessary claim. A better way to phrase it would thus be, “As the only democratic state in the region, Israel respects the rights of its minorities and expects their democratic loyalty in return.”

Clearly, the framers of the Kineret Declaration worked hard to arrive at their consensus. Any comparison with the American declaration would reveal, however, how far they are from the spirit of a proud democracy. I would urge the declaration’s framing committee to address Israel’s situation more honestly than they have done. Democracy requires self-accountability, to be sure, but it must have the confidence to demand its elemental rights from others.

Ruth R. Wisse
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITORS:

The Kineret Declaration is an impressive and moving piece of work, especially considering that it is a document negotiated in committee. How sad that matters had to come to such a dangerous pass for a proclamation of this nature to be possible—but that seems to be the way of human nature, particularly since the events of September 11.

It was interesting to note that of the various minorities in Israel whose rights the declaration seeks to recognize within the framework of a Jewish and democratic state, Arabs are mentioned explicitly, but not Christians. I suppose this is because the number of Christian Israelis is very small and there are no particular political issues concerning their civil and religious rights. Nevertheless, I must say that, as a Christian, I yearn for the day when Jerusalem, including the Old City, is under unified and strong Israeli political control.

On the way toward achieving that goal, I hope the Kineret Declaration proves to be influential.

Christopher DeMuth
President
American Enterprise Institute
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITORS:

My reaction to the principles of the Kineret Declaration can only be described as a mixture of surprise and disappointment: Surprise that the declaration is viewed by its signatories as having “achieved something important for the country’s Jewish identity,” and disappointment that AZURE has endorsed it. After all, when the price of unity is endorsing the lowest common denominator, it is not worth paying.

The declaration is in fact contradictory in nature, and seems rooted in the kind of never-never-land thinking that politicians such as Yossi Beilin and Shimon Peres employ—and which AZURE has in the past criticized so eloquently. From the declaration’s emphasis on accepting the “decisions of the majority,” one would think that Israel will belong to the Palestinian people the moment they outnumber the country’s Jewish population. No less troubling is the assertion that the Jews can only keep their numerical advantage “by moral means,” whatever that is.

From the declaration, you would never know that Israel is dealing with the huge problem of an Arab fifth column. The signatories expect that the Palestinians will recognize Israel’s right to exist, when it seems clear that they will not. The declaration is pie

in the sky, its Zionist credentials dubious, for it gives short shrift to the land of Israel. What purpose does this declaration serve, in the end, except to drive another nail into the coffin of the Israeli Right?

Herbert Zweibon

Chairman

Americans for a Safe Israel

New York City

TO THE EDITORS:

I was pleased to see that, in general, “Miracle on the Sea of Galilee” proved to be a well-written and faithful portrayal of the Kineret Declaration. However, I believe it is important to make a clear statement regarding the indirect significance of the declaration, as distinct from the language of the articles themselves: (i) The achievement of a core agreement concerning the Jewish-democratic nature of Israel; (ii) the success of an open discussion between various groups in Israeli society for whom achieving a core agreement is an overriding principle; and (iii) the awareness of the possibility of making Jewish unity a reality.

It is important to emphasize that the Kineret Declaration is only a starting point, not a culmination. The core agreement has yet to be finalized and

fleshed out, and only then can we begin the essential task of translating it into common action.

Uzi Dayan

Chairman

The Committee for National

Responsibility

Tel Aviv

TO THE EDITORS:

I was quite taken aback to read of AZURE's admiration for the "Miracle on the Sea of Galilee," or Kineret Declaration, that forms the subject of a recent editorial. Granted, in the social and political reality in which we find ourselves, it certainly does seem nothing short of a miracle that Amram Mitzna, Asa Kasher, Effie Eitam, and Yoram Hazony met together under the same ideological roof. Yet any sense of encouragement we may have gotten from this rare meeting of minds quickly turns to disappointment when we take a closer look at the declaration itself, and discover the price the Right has paid for its long-awaited opportunity to dance with Peace Now. That price is no less than the land of Israel; in other words, they sold their birthright for a mess of pottage.

Why their "birthright"? Because of Article 6 of the declaration, which states that "Israel is prepared... to recognize the legitimate rights of the

neighboring Palestinian people"; that "Israel has no wish to rule over another people"; and that "Israel sees the principle of self-determination and its expression within the framework of national states" as a basis for a solution to the ongoing conflict. Put simply, the declaration is endorsing a Palestinian state in Judea and Samaria.

Why a "mess of pottage"? Because it seems that what the national camp received from its new friends on the far Left was nothing more than empty words. Not surprisingly, Uzi Dayan was happy to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Ehud Olmert, and Shlomo Avineri to line up with Naomi Shemer, in order to recognize the Law of Return, the importance of *aliya*, the Jewish holidays, the *menora* as a symbol, and the national anthem. We are supposed to be grateful to them, I suppose, for the spirit of compromise they brought to the table.

And in return for all these things, the signatories in the national and religious camp paid with their homeland—with agreements to establish a state for another nation in the very heart of the land of Israel.

Let us be clear: Anyone agreeing to the establishment of a Palestinian state in the land of Israel is admitting that the land is actually Palestinian. Those on the Right who, for the first time in Israel's history, joined in this

“admission,” did not just compose grandiose words devoid of real meaning, as we have come to expect of their leftist colleagues. Instead, they delivered the goods. During our long years of exile, even in our moments of greatest weakness, no rabbis, and certainly no whole communities, ever gave up their right to the land of Israel. And even if they had, what would their signatures on any “declaration” have been worth? The absurd conclusion to which this declaration leads us is that, in fact, the Jewish people had to return to the land of their fathers and establish Jewish sovereignty there only so as to have the *official* right to relinquish that land in favor of “the legitimate rights of the neighboring Palestinian people.”

In response to criticisms over his involvement with the declaration, National Religious Party Chairman Effie Eitam said that it never occurred to him that Article 6 referred to “western Israel”; instead, he insists, he intended to support the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination *east* of the Jordan River. All that remains now is to ask signatories such as Asa Kasher and Aviv Gefen if they, too, had the kingdom of Jordan in mind when they signed on that same clause. On the other hand, one has to wonder if Israel Harel, Yoram Hazony, Naomi Shemer, and President Moshe

Katsav also intended, like Effie Eitam, the state of Jordan, when they seem to have clearly recognized the Palestinian people’s right to establish a “national state” within the framework of their own. If there is indeed disagreement on this point, would it not follow that the parties did not, in fact, sign the same document, and that the “miracle” never happened?

Elyakim Haetzni
Kiryat Arba

TO THE EDITORS:

Your recent editorial, “Miracle on the Sea of Galilee,” expresses its approval of the initiative undertaken by representatives of a range of opinions in Israeli public affairs to compose a joint declaration.

The editors are correct in describing this undertaking as an impressive and admirable act, one that reveals the painful yet necessary lessons Israeli society has learned from the murder of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin; from the security situation in Israel and especially in Judea and Samaria; and from the economic and social issues that have plagued the country in the shadow of a six-year recession.

I was also pleased to see in the declaration signs of a comeback in Zionist thought. Whereas some critics of the Kineret Declaration claim

to see in its principles no more than empty words, I believe that it clearly identifies the State of Israel as the national home of the Jewish people. Furthermore, the Kineret Declaration managed to unite the haredim, the Right, the Center, and the Left—even down to peace activists such as Yael Tamir and Alex Yakobson—in an unambiguous affirmation of the Jewish nature of the state (albeit not in the theological, but rather the Zionist and nationalist sense).

Those who examine closely the text of the declaration cannot fail to be impressed by the drafters' awareness of the basic rights of the citizen, and by the prevailing sense of democracy which deals a final blow to the hollow stereotype of religion as somehow anti-democratic and anti-human-rights. Here we have Bnei Brak Mayor Mordechai Karelitz and even National Religious Party leader Effie Eitam reading from the same score as long-time civil rights activist Ruth Gavison.

For these reasons, we should welcome the declaration as another important contribution to a meaningful public debate on the essential values of Israeli society. However, the authors of the Kineret Declaration cannot stop here. There have been many attempts to unite the factions of Israeli society around a shared commitment to basic principles, and most have come to naught. The Kineret Declaration's

authors must continue to raise awareness of these principles among all citizens of the State of Israel.

Raz Meir

Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITORS:

In "Miracle on the Sea of Galilee," AZURE's editors offer a defense of the Kineret Declaration, which was signed by members of the Israeli-Jewish elite representing the entire ideological spectrum. The editors highlight what they view as the positive aspects of the declaration: Jewish sovereignty in Israel; national unity; and even an affirmation of solidarity with the legacy of Israel and the Bible. They conclude that this is a "valuable precedent" and "no small achievement," and are moreover pleased that not one of the declaration's utterances "represent[s] a major departure from the beliefs of classical Zionism."

Three cheers, then, appear to be in order. However, the full text of the declaration makes clear that it is indeed "no small achievement"—of the extreme Left, that is. In fact, it is one of their most remarkable victories in recent years. Ironically, my claim is best supported by the essay "The End of Zionism?" (AZURE 1, Summer 1996) by Yoram Hazony, former president of the Shalem Center and a Kineret Declaration signatory. There,

Hazony reminds us that Zionism was originally based on the idea that the land of Israel is the historical legacy of the Jewish people; and that all Israeli governments prior to 1993 had taken the position that “the Arabs, having secured self-expression in twenty Arab national states, do not need one more.”

Hazony was thus rightly disturbed that, in signing the Oslo accords, the government of Israel had recognized the “mutual legitimate and political rights” of the PLO and Israel, a phrase which implies Arab national rights to the land of Israel that are equivalent to the rights of the Jewish people. In his opinion, “The recognition of such an Arab national right to the land of Israel is a flagrantly post-Zionist proposition. It means that the PLO’s carnival of carnage spanning three decades was a perhaps distasteful, but nevertheless *justified* war of resistance.”

And yet, in the space of a few short years, Hazony has himself become one of the drafters of that very same sort of cultural dynamite that he once warned so vehemently against. Indeed, Article 6 of the declaration is an almost word-for-word copy of the best of post-Zionist philosophy:

Israel is prepared, therefore, to recognize the legitimate rights of the neighboring Palestinian people, on condition that it recognize the

legitimate rights of the Jewish people. Israel has no wish to rule over another people, but it insists that no people and no state try to bring about its destruction as a Jewish state. Israel sees the principle of self-determination and its expression within the framework of national states, as well as a readiness for compromise on the part of both sides, as the basis for the resolution of the conflict.

While there is a certain comfort to be taken from the neologism “the legitimate rights of the Jewish people,” which appeared nowhere in the Camp David or Oslo accords, the above statement is in direct contradiction to the sentiments expressed in another of Hazony’s articles, “New God of Palestine” (Editorial, *Azure* 2, Spring 1997), in which he deprecates the PLO’s determination to create “a new ‘Palestinian’ nation” by creating facts that are “historically without basis” and “fabricating national memories.”

The declaration goes even further with Article 5, which sounds as if it might have been lifted directly from the platform of one of Israel’s Arab parties. Indeed, it calls for the eradication of the Jewish-Zionist character of the state: “Israel will ensure the right of the Arab minority to maintain its linguistic, cultural, and national identity.” In much the same way, the National Democratic Assembly, under the leadership of Azmi

Bishara, wants to recognize “Arab citizens as a national minority with the right to self-determination in matters of culture that distinguish them from other citizens.” One has to wonder why the authors felt it necessary to include this statement as a separate clause, since civil equality without distinction of religion, race, origin, and so forth is already guaranteed in Article 2.

Whereas we might expect Ariel Sharon to use the flimsy excuse of political and coalition pressures, not so AZURE. How can it be that a journal founded on the recognition of those classical Zionistic values so necessary for the preservation of the Jewish state has turned them into a bargaining chip? The declaration is, in essence, saying: “Give me a commitment to the Jews in the diaspora, and take self-determination for Israel’s Arabs in return.”

It is particularly disappointing that at the very moment in which the Left has found itself battered, bruised, and in disarray, some of the nation’s best and brightest have allowed themselves to be suckered into the honey trap of the radical Left.

Aryeh Perlman
Jerusalem

TO THE EDITORS:

The Kineret Declaration gives us reason for both celebration and deep concern: Celebration, because it codifies the principles by which the State of Israel should be governed, foremost among them the affirmation of its Jewish and democratic character. Concern, because the declaration is, at heart, no more than an updated version of Israel’s Declaration of Independence—something that should, after 54 years, have already been deeply ingrained in the hearts and minds of every Israeli citizen.

As someone who agrees with the declaration’s principles, I find it useful to justify them, oddly enough, in terms of the claims of its detractors—namely, in terms of the argument that, because Israel’s Arab citizens took no part in the formulation of the declaration, its democratic quality is somehow diminished. These critics would rather the declaration have included Arab signatories, and therefore stated definitively that Israel must be a “state of all its citizens.” But a “state of all its citizens” is not, in fact, a progressive democratic concept, but rather one that turns the clock back about 200 years. Why? Because in light of Israel’s demographics, a state “of all its citizens” will eventually lead (at best) to the emancipation of the Jews in the land of Israel: When the *Jews*

become the minority, at least they will still maintain their religious and cultural independence.

The declaration is lacking in two essential respects: First, it does not reach a consensus on a constructive definition of “who is a Jew.” If this definition is not grounded in religion—whether as a matter of faith or as a concession to the idea that religion is a framework for unity—then Israel will surely cease to be the Jewish state. Religion, it is important to note, need not be solely equated with halacha, or Jewish law. Religion can also be a term that embraces history, culture, and common ethnicity. At the end of the day, however, it is only the religious ingredient that will sustain our Jewish identity. Therefore the uniqueness of the Jewish religion is indeed significant—not just for the sake of an internal identity, but also because of the need for international recognition of why the continued existence of the Jewish state is so important.

Second, there is no final decision in the declaration regarding the state’s borders. It is obvious to most of us today that the borders of the state are not only a security or a moral issue, but also a demographic one. If we were to become a Jewish minority in Israel, the ground would be pulled from under us were we then to

continue demanding that Israel be recognized as a Jewish state.

The Kineret Declaration is nonetheless a meaningful step forward. Now what remains is to chart the course we want to follow.

Avi Shilon

Tel Aviv

YORAM HAZONY RESPONDS:

Critics of the Kineret Declaration such as Elyakim Haetzni, Ruth Wisse, and Herbert Zweibon have denounced the agreement, arguing that it gives up important political assets in exchange for what is in effect a collection of worthless platitudes. In my estimation, these critics misjudge both what is taking place within Israeli society and the meaning of the agreement itself. As a co-author and signatory, I believe the Kineret Declaration is a milestone of considerable importance, establishing, for the first time since the 1973 Yom Kippur War, a framework of bedrock principles around which the great majority of Israeli Jews can be united; and upon which a broad-based effort to extract our people from the circumstances in which it finds itself can be built.

What are these circumstances, and what are these principles?

For more than thirty years, Israel has been bitterly divided. Idealists

and ideologues of the Left and Right split the public between them, and the once-dominant Zionist Center, as represented in the first decades of the state by David Ben-Gurion's Labor Party and its allies, collapsed. The result has been a culture of internal division, mutual recrimination, and hatred, which has poisoned the life of our polity, and made true unity of purpose among Jews all but unthinkable.

We Jews have long since accustomed ourselves to a public culture marred by this unbridgeable polarity. But the events of the past seven years, including the assassination of an elected Israeli prime minister and more than two years of warfare waged against Israel by the Palestinian Authority, have brought changes in the way Israeli Jews understand the public life of their country. Few are now as certain as they once were that a Palestinian state will bring peace; just as few are as certain as they once were that Jewish settlement in the West Bank and Gaza will bring strength.

But along with this erosion of old political certainties, there has come a certain clarity of vision in another area. It is now evident that regardless of who was right in the bitter arguments of the past thirty years, the Jewish state and the Jewish people, facing unprecedented crises both

internally and externally, cannot continue to stand divided against itself. Today, the highest priority has become an accommodation that will reconstruct the Zionist Center, put an end to the chronic condition of internal strife, and permit the great majority of Jews to stand together within a body politic characterized by a substantial degree of unity of purpose.

A few years ago, I published a book in which I argued that the principal obstacle to such an accommodation is the rejection of traditional Zionist ideas by much of the country's cultural leadership. The very term "Jewish state"—the central idea in Israel's Declaration of Independence and in the Israeli political tradition—had become for many an embarrassment, to the point that these words could not even be pronounced without equivocation. "State of its citizens," "state of the Jews," "state of the Jewish people and of all of its citizens," "Jewish and democratic state"—anything was better than explicit use of the term chosen by Israel's founders and enshrined in its Declaration of Independence, "Jewish state." And along with the retreat from this term had come a retreat from the idea it represents: The idea that Israel is a state founded with a political purpose, and that this purpose is to be a sovereign power acting on behalf of

the interests and aspirations of the Jewish people as a whole.

How can one explain this abandonment of the expression “Jewish state” and of the ideal to which it refers? This vexing question can, at the risk of oversimplification, be answered as follows. In the rush to placate Arab political ambitions, the Jewish people gave up not only on territory, but also on significant parts of the Jewish political tradition, which were felt to stand in the way of good relations with the Arab world and its European sympathizers. Central among these was the term “Jewish state” and what it stands for. Those who do not immediately know what I am referring to should ask themselves the following question: Our Arab interlocutors constantly press us to recognize the “legitimate rights of the Palestinian people,” and to accede to the establishment of a “Palestinian state.” How is it, then, that amid all these discussions, negotiations, and agreements, whether with the Arab states, with the PLO and the Palestinian Authority, or with the leaders of the Arab minority in Israel, one never seems to hear of the “legitimate rights of the Jewish people,” or of our people’s right to a “Jewish state”?

We are not used to admitting the truth in this matter. The reason our side in these discussions does not

insist on the “legitimate rights of the Jewish people” and demand recognition of Israel as a “Jewish state” is that we know the Arabs will not accept it. Recognition of “the fact that Israel exists” is one thing. After all, an Israel with a Jewish majority today may have an Arab majority tomorrow. But to assent to the proposition that the *Jews* have a right to a state that is *their own*, just as the Arabs do—this, we are told, is something else entirely. This is Zionism, which is racism. This is some kind of moral or theological abomination. No negotiation with any significant Arab political body has ever once suggested acceptance of the legitimacy of Israel as the state of the Jewish people. The answer to this is simply—“No. We cannot accept that.”

Fear of Arab opinion in this matter has been the life and drum of Israeli political culture for a generation. It is this fear that dictates what we teach in high-school civics, history, and archaeology; that fuels the demand to abolish the Law of Return and the national anthem; that is the basis of our willingness to concede that no Jew will ever set foot on the Temple Mount again. It is this fear that nearly wiped out the use of the term “Jewish state” from our public life. And it is this fear, too, that prevented, for nearly a generation, public gatherings

of Israeli Jews *as Jews*, to discuss Jewish interests, needs, and aspirations. The entire concept of Jewish interests, as distinct from those of the Arab world, of the Palestinians, of Israeli Arabs, was driven underground, to be discussed only in very small groups, or else not at all. Our leading men and women have wandered so far that in the first weeks of the discussions that led to the Kineret Declaration, the respected constitutional scholar Ruth Gavison was constrained to explain at length why it is legitimate for Jews to gather together, just as Arabs do, to discuss their common interests.

Herein lies the real significance of the negotiations surrounding the Kineret Declaration. Those who deride the value of this “dance” among Jews of various persuasions seem not to have grasped what it means for the individuals in question to publicly negotiate and reach agreement on a joint statement of Jewish interests, needs, and aspirations; nor what it means to have, for the first time in thirty years, a united Jewish position that can be the basis for discussions with the Arabs, where until now such discussions had been based on the views of only a certain segment of the Jewish public. In the Kineret Declaration, Israeli Jewry has, for the first time in a generation, spoken clearly and in a single

voice. And this voice has committed itself to the view that there does exist a common Jewish interest, and that there will be no separate peace between the Arab world, on the one hand, and a narrow segment of Jewish opinion, on the other.

In terms of its substance, too, the Kineret Declaration is a path-breaking document, which re-establishes the existence of a Jewish-Israeli consensus concerning Israel’s character as a Jewish state. Among its provisions are the following:

1. The declaration re-establishes the term *Jewish state* as the political ideal at the center of Israel’s political tradition. (Articles 3, 4)

2. The declaration re-establishes the *Jewish historical narrative*, from the Bible to the Holocaust, as the basis for Israel’s national life. (Articles 1, 3)

3. The declaration asserts that the existence of a *Jewish sovereignty* is “an enduring and unquestionable right” of the Jewish people. (Articles 1, 3)

4. Israel as a state is committed to the *continuity and strengthening of the Jewish people*, and to taking responsibility for the well-being of the Jewish people. The state will assist in Jewish education in the diaspora and come to the aid of Jewish communities in distress. (Article 3)

5. Israel is committed to the maintenance of its *Jewish majority* and to the Law of Return granting Jews the right to immigrate to Israel. (Articles 3, 4)

6. Israel is committed to the maintenance of a *Jewish school system*, whose purpose, in addition to general studies, is “to inculcate... an attachment to the Jewish people, the Jewish heritage, and the book of books.” The educational system will also encourage “love of the land of Israel.” (Article 3)

7. Israel is committed to the maintenance of state institutions whose purpose is the advancement of *Jewish national culture*, including the Hebrew language. Hebrew is explicitly accepted as “the principal language of the state.” (Article 3)

8. The declaration asserts that *Jewish religion* has “an important place in the public sphere and in the public aspects of the life of the state.” At the same time, it confirms the principle that religious norms should not be imposed on the private life of the individual. (Article 9)

9. The declaration makes specific reference to the role of the *Tora* in Jewish civilization; to *Jerusalem* as Israel’s capital; and to *God* as the creator of all men. (Articles 1, 2)

10. The declaration explicitly rejects the claim made by Jewish and Arab public figures in recent years to

the effect that Israel’s Jewish character stands in tension with its *democratic government* or with the rights of minorities. The state’s commitment to democracy and civil rights is reconfirmed. In particular, the declaration expresses Israeli Jews’ feelings of solidarity with the Druze and other national minorities who are full partners in the upbuilding of the state and its defense. (Articles 4, 5)

I think the achievement here is unequivocal. If one remains committed to the letter and spirit of this document, its meaning is that Israeli Jews will no longer accept a “neutral” Israeli state as a tacit precondition for discussions with our Arab neighbors. Just as the latter have their Arab national states, so too will the Jews have their one Jewish state. For Israeli Jews and for the Jewish people as a whole, this is a red-line issue, and the Kineret Declaration establishes this explicitly.

Elyakim Haetzni expresses contempt for all the Jewish-state talk in the Kineret Declaration, which to him is no more than “empty words,” at most a “mess of potage.” After all, how hard can it be to get Jews to declare Israel to be a Jewish state?

With all due respect, it appears to me that Haetzni is misinformed as to what has been going on in Tel Aviv for the past thirty years. Certainly, it

is true that the contingent of Peace Now veterans in the Kineret discussions included a handful of *Judenstaatlers*, whose commitment to the above-mentioned principles does not fall short of mine, or of anyone else's. Among these I would include Ari Shavit and Alex Yakobson, who were among the initiators of the declaration, and who invested prodigious efforts in persuading their colleagues to unite behind the declaration. But for others, things were by no means so cut-and-dry.

One naturally tends to focus on the 150 public figures who eventually signed the declaration. But this striking display of consensus obscures the twelve months of efforts that brought this consensus into being. In fact, the principal threats to reaching any agreement at all during the year of discussions that led up to the Kineret Declaration were the demand for the inclusion of Arab representation in discussions and the demand to exclude the term "Jewish state." There were individuals who walked out on the discussions for these reasons and did not return. Even on the day of the final ratification, the demand to remove the term "Jewish state" was the subject of a row that subsided only when the chairman of the Committee for National Responsibility, Major-General Uzi Dayan, announced that

he would not sign a document that did not include the term "Jewish state." Moreover, a careful consideration of who did *not* sign the Kineret Declaration would reveal key public figures whose names do not appear precisely because of the term "Jewish state," or because of related issues such as the declaration's endorsement of the Law of Return.

Some of the declaration's critics know all of this quite well. Nonetheless, they are preoccupied with what they see as the grave concessions made in the substance and language of the declaration. It is true, of course, that the Kineret Declaration sometimes uses language I might not have chosen had I been the sole author. But even so, I cannot see how restating my commitment to the rights of Israel's Arab minority, or to peace between Israel and its neighbors, or to a politics of moral means—all of them things to which I have always been committed—has rendered me or any of the other signatories "obsequious" or how it bespeaks a "failure of nerve," as Ruth Wisse would have it. Nor do I see these things as having "put the last nail in the coffin" of Jewish nationalism, or anything similar to this.

The same may be said with regard to the reference to Israeli Arabs' "national identity." For better or worse,

Israeli Arabs have been recognized as having a separate national identity since Israel's founding. This is the reason they are permitted to operate an entirely separate Arabic-language school system, and the reason Israeli identity cards until only recently included a line that read, "Nationality: Jewish" or "Nationality: Arab." In this, Israel differs from the United States and France, where all citizens are expected to see themselves as belonging to the same "people"; and where, as a consequence, everyone is expected to attend the same schools and speak the same language. In Israel, Jews and Arabs share a common citizenship, but they are not expected to assimilate into a single national identity. This reflects the preferences of both Jews and Arabs, who see themselves as belonging to different peoples; and who, as a consequence, want their children to attend separate school systems and speak separate languages. I do not see any need for a change in this matter, and the Kineret Declaration simply accepts it as an integral part of Israeli democracy.

More to the point is Haetzni's criticism that the Kineret Declaration, in accepting a solution to Arab-Jewish conflict on the basis of national states, implies the establishment of a fully independent Palestinian-Arab state west of the Jordan River. Factually,

this claim is incorrect. Everyone at the table when the Kineret Declaration was being negotiated understood that there was no possibility of a coalition document of this sort endorsing something as contentious as a Palestinian state, and, indeed, it makes no such endorsement. What it does do is to devote three sentences to wording ambiguous enough to permit a spectrum of interpretations, including Effie Eitam's proposal that a Palestinian national state be established on the East Bank of the Jordan.

This having been said, I do not think that a normative reading of Article 6 in fact points in this direction. The reason I say this is that Eitam's interpretation rests on the belief that a Jewish state with a population the size of Israel's can somehow succeed in absorbing the Arab cities of the West Bank. This, I think, is clearly incorrect. Israel cannot absorb these cities into itself; consequently, the ultimate political disposition of most of this Arab population will have to be found in its association with an Arab national state, or at least in some more limited form of self-government that will be Arab-national in character. There is no question that one *can* conclude from this that there should be an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank; many have interpreted

the inclusion of the “legitimate rights of the Palestinian people” in the peace treaty with Egypt as implying precisely this, and I think that it is absurd to expect a coalition document such as the Kineret Declaration to preclude this idea entirely.

To leave the door open to such a possibility is not, however, the same as endorsing it. In fact, the Kineret Declaration amends the language of the Camp David accords by making the question of the Palestinian polity conditional on the acceptance of the “legitimate rights of the Jewish people”:

Israel is prepared, therefore, to recognize the legitimate rights of the neighboring Palestinian people, *on condition that it recognize the legitimate rights of the Jewish people*. Israel has no wish to rule over another people, but it insists that no people and no state try to bring about its destruction *as a Jewish state*. [emphasis added]

In other words, the Kineret Declaration for the first time accepts the premise that, however one chooses to interpret the rights of the Palestinian Arabs, these rights cannot be taken to be absolute and independent of all other considerations. If the Palestinian Authority is to be a terror-sponsoring regime, whose desire and capacity to recognize the rights of the Jewish people remain questionable at

best, then its right to establish itself in the West Bank will be forfeit. In this context, the introduction of the demand that Israel be recognized as a Jewish state (as it was, incidentally, in the UN plan of 1947) is of the essence. It is this demand alone that can end the duplicity on the part of Arab leaders who are willing to recognize “the fact that Israel exists,” while at the same time insisting that, as a Jewish state, it is illegitimate—and therefore a fair target for an endless war of terror, diplomatic confrontation, boycott, and anti-Semitic incitement.

This transition from a belief in the absolute character of Palestinian-Arab rights, to a belief in the conditional quality of these rights, reflects a clear change in the standpoint of Israeli Jews after ten years of bloodshed in the wake of the Oslo accords. By making political gains for the Palestinian Arabs conditional on recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, the Kineret Declaration seeks to adjust Israeli foreign policy to the harsh realities with which Israel is presently confronted. On the one hand, it does leave open the possibility of the establishment of a Palestinian-Arab national state. On the other, it makes any step in this direction conditional on what is in fact the minimum real requirement if there is to be peace: The Arabs must be willing to recognize the right of

the Jewish people to a Jewish state, just as Israel recognizes the right of the Arab peoples to their Arab national states.

For the time being, it appears that no Palestinian regime will be willing to accept Israel as a Jewish state, even in exchange for its independence. Much of the Palestinian-Arab leadership continues to believe that Israel, as a Jewish state, is illegitimate; and that it must be replaced with a binational state, the precursor to an “Israel” with an Arab majority. Whether in the form of a suicidal terror war, or of a more sophisticated “cold war,” the Palestinian leadership as a whole still seems to be committed to its war against the Jews. For this reason, the entire matter of a workable Palestinian state is, from the perspective of the Kineret Declaration, remote. More remote, even, than the reassertion of Jordanian control in the Arab cities in the West Bank—which would at least have the advantage that it might really bring peace.

This brings me to Aryeh Perlman’s effort to demonstrate, on the basis of quotations from my writings, that the Kineret Declaration represents a shift in my views. Perlman’s question is a fair one, but I am afraid his argument is based on a mistaken interpretation of the viewpoint defended in those articles. The passage of time has given

me no cause to regret anything I said or wrote with regard to the 1993 Oslo accords or the character of the PLO leadership with whom that bargain was struck. At the time, I was among those who said that the Oslo agreement would bring Lebanon to the outskirts of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem; and in this, unfortunately, my worst fears have been fulfilled. But this does not mean I was committed to direct Israeli political control of the Arab cities of the West Bank. As I have said, Israel’s Jewish population is not nearly large enough to make the incorporation of these Palestinian-Arab populations into the Israeli polity feasible. As early as 1985, I therefore wrote in support of considering options such as autonomy and Jordanian control in various of the territories in question. The demographic circumstances today are far worse than they were then, and I still do not see how anyone can seriously contemplate direct annexation.

Finally, I should like to say a word concerning Christopher DeMuth’s question regarding Christians in Israel and the territories. It seems to me that the suffering of the Christian-Arab minority is one of the great unspoken tragedies of the political landscape that has been created by the Oslo agreement. The aim of men such as Yasser Arafat is to do to the

Christians of Bethlehem what was done to the Christians of Beirut: To reduce them gradually to a state of helplessness and submission. Difficult as it may be to admit this, the well-being of Christian Arabs in the West Bank and Lebanon depends not on the good graces of Muslim rulers, which have so rarely been forthcoming, so much as on the strength of their relationship with Israel. My own hope is that one day the Christian-Arab communities in and around Israel will be able to free themselves from the fear of Muslim fanaticism and enter into a relationship of mutual respect and genuine peace with the Jewish state. This is certainly a subject that future discussions of the kind that gave birth to the Kineret Declaration will have to address.

As I indicated earlier, I do not believe that every word of the Kineret Declaration is as it would have been if I had written it myself. To point to one out of many examples, I believe that the extreme tax burden in Israel, which has grown even worse in recent years, can only result in the flight of Jewish manpower, talent, and capital from the country. As such, I see the stifled market mechanisms as a real threat to our ability to maintain a Jewish majority here. However, not only did I fail to introduce economic growth into

the document as a matter of significant Zionist concern, I consider myself fortunate to have persuaded my colleagues at least to give up on the worst of the socialist language some of them found so enticing.

This is the way of these things. Coalition agreements are by their nature based on give-and-take. The question in any given instance is whether what is gained in establishing a coalition is worth the price. Some feel it is, so they take the responsibility of negotiating and affixing their names to something that by its nature can never be perfect. Others feel it is not, so they do not negotiate and they do not sign. By this, they gain whatever advantage comes of never having compromised on anything. But they must also live with the knowledge that at the crucial moment they gained nothing for their cause, for the simple reason that they were willing to give nothing up.

So it is with the Kineret Declaration, of which I am proud to have been a co-author and a signatory. Whatever give-and-take took place in the drafting of this document, I believe, was more than justified by the circumstances in which the Jewish people presently finds itself; and by the gains made in the declaration with respect to fundamental Zionist principles, and in particular with respect

to the ideal of Israel as the Jewish state. For the first time in a generation, these principles have received explicit public endorsement by Israeli public figures from across the political and cultural spectrum, in an alignment that represents the great majority of Israeli Jews, and of diaspora

Jews as well. This is, of course, no more than a first step in the effort to heal the rift that has divided our people for so long, and to re-establish a strong Zionist center that can fill this divide. But it is such a first step. As such, I believe it is worthy of all the support that can be given it.

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