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Series A: Writings and Addresses. 1947-1991

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ADDRESS BY RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM, DIRECTOR
OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE,
BEFORE KIRCHENTAG, DÜSSELDORF, FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

JUNE 8, 1985
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THEME "Was können wir vor der Nahostlösung für Israel tun?"

I wish to begin with my expression of profound gratitude for allowing me to share in the moving experience last Thursday morning. It was memorable for me to witness several thousand of you spontaneously demonstrate your rejection of Nazi tyranny and anti-Semitism, as well as your deep commitment to the constitutional democracy of the New Germany.

The tragic Bitburg cemetery affair has stirred up troubled feelings among millions of Americans, -- not only Jews -- over whether the German people have truly confronted the evil of nazism and have made a determination to uproot that demonic ideology root and branch. As a result of what I experienced with you this week, I plan to tell the American people that they can have confidence in you, that there is a whole new generation of German men and women who are facing the horrors of that terrible past and who are committed to building and defending a genuine democracy. That "New Germany" is forged in the inspired traditions of the first Chancellors of the Federal Republic, Konrad Adenauer and Kurt Schumacher. They must remain the symbol and inspiration of our reconciliation -- not Bitburg cemeteries with Waffen SS gravestones.

Now, to the theme, "What can we do to help Israel?" I wish to suggest briefly three areas of major significance. In the language of computers, two are "software," one is "hardware," but each is important to Israel's security and well-being.

I - STAND UP AGAINST THE "VERBAL VIOLENCE" AGAINST ISRAEL.

Since the adoption in 1975 by the United Nations of the obscene "Zionism is racism" resolution, there has been a veritable flood of verbal violence against Israel, Zionism, and the Jewish people. The PLO, some Arab states, the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc nations have mounted a systematic campaign at every international forum to stigmatize Israel and the Jews as "demonic," "Satanic," even "Nazi-like." [The AJ Committee has just issued a pamphlet, "Anti-Semitic Rhetoric at the UN" which documents that hate campaign.] That incessant hate campaign violates the basic principles of the United Nations Charter as well as the explicit prohibitions against incitement to verbal violence contained in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

As Prof. Gordon Allport of Harvard University demonstrates in his landmark "The Study of Prejudice," verbal violence is a precondition to physical violence and human destruction. The pattern is clear -- it begins by portraying a group as demonic, then delegitimizes the group, then dehumanizes it, emptying it of all claims for human compassion and empathy. The road is then prepared for the terrible physical violence, "the Final Solution "

That is precisely the pattern that Adolf Hitler and his diabolic propagandists followed relentlessly in portraying the Jews as hate-filled stereotypes and caricatures -- untermenschen, vermin, lice, filth -- and then all resistance was removed to destroying these dehumanized people in crematoria.

Such propaganda warfare dedicated to delegitimizing Israel goes on regularly at the United Nations and its agencies. It is mainly the United States that opposes that campaign of verbal violence against Israel and Jews

My question to you is Where are the voices of the churches in condemning prophetically this anti-human and anti-Jewish campaign of defamation? The governments of the Federal Republic of Germany have been greatly supportive of Israel, and Jewish people everywhere are grateful for that support. But why does the Federal Republic of Germany remain silent or abstain when such Nazi-like propaganda pollutes the international atmosphere? We have put that question to your government, and the answers, I must say in all candor, are evasive. It would be important that you and your churches put these kinds of moral questions to your Government as well, and demand that it take a public stand against such lies and defamation of the Jewish people

II - STAND UP AGAINST DOUBLE-STANDARDS IN THE MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION AGAINST ISRAEL.

When the Christian Phalangists carried out a terrible massacre against Palestinians in Sabra and Shatilla in September 1982, radio and TV commentators, and the print media, had a Mardi Gras in attacking Israel, even though not a single shot was fired by an Israeli soldier.

For the past several weeks, Shiite Muslims -- backed by Syria and Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, have been waging a ruthless, savage attack against Palestinians. In the same camps, the Amal Shiites have massacred some 500 Palestinians, and wounded several thousand others. And the world sits by silently and shrugs

An editorialist in the United States described the double standards issue in this way

"The moralizing over the tragedy nearly three years ago certainly contributed to the decisions by both the U.S. and Israel to quit Lebanon and to curtail their support for its beleaguered pro-Western forces." But you don't hear the moralists now. They aren't asking for a commission of inquiry in Damascus. They aren't heaping on the head of President Assad the kind of hateful language they leveled at Prime Minister Begin. And they appear to take no notice whatsoever of the fact that Syria's brutal consolidation of its hegemony in Lebanon is taking place under the cover provided by Moscow. After a while it makes one wonder whether it was the deaths of innocent Palestinians that was worrying the moralists to begin with or the possibility of a Western victory."

The Biblical response to double standards is clear and compelling "There shall be one set of weights and one set of measures for the homeborn, the stranger, and the alien at your gates."

IV - ISRAEL'S ECONOMY, GERMANY, AND THE EEC.

As is well known, the Government and people of Israel are going through a very difficult and stressful economic period. As a result of the belligerency of Israel's Arab neighbors and their refusal -- except for Egypt -- up to now to enter into negotiations for peace, Israel has had to spend more than 25 percent of her budget on defense. In order to maintain its qualitative edge over hostile Arab neighbors, who have amassed large arsenals, defense has become a heavy burden on the Israeli economy. In 1982 alone, Saudi Arabia's military expenditures exceeded Israel's entire GNP. Israel currently spends about one-third of its GNP on defense, compared with 7 percent before the Yom Kippur War in 1973.

In addition, about half of Israel's \$22 billion budget is allocated to debt repayment and servicing. Nearly half of Israel's \$24 billion foreign debt is owed to the United States government, and Israel has never missed a debt payment.

During the past year, Israel's Government of National Unity has begun to take difficult but significant steps to resolve its serious economic problems. These measures include a cut of \$1.4 billion for next year's budget. The Defense Ministry alone will absorb a cut of about \$300 million, plus another \$200 million resulting from Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon.

Israel has been forced to cut subsidies in social welfare services, education, medical care, has frozen all wages and prices, and has banned imports of all luxury items.

The key to economic growth for Israel is to increase her exports, and to stimulate incentives for foreign investments in export-oriented industries.

Here the people and government of West Germany can play a critical role in support of Israel's economic security. Forty-percent of Israel's exports go to the European Economic Community countries. When Spain and Portugal enter the EEC next January, it will be vital that their welcome entry is not done at the expense of Israel's economic well-being (Spain, too, needs to be encouraged to establish diplomatic relations with Israel before January 1986)

Beyond that, West Germany which has been most generous in its economic aid to Third World countries, should be encouraged to help Israel through loans, and above all, through German investment in Israel's industrial life

Such practical economic aid will give meaning and substance to the "special relationship" which has existed between Germany and Israel since the creation of the Jewish State in 1948.

