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AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

*Preserving American Jewish History*

MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series E: General Alphabetical Files. 1960-1992

Box 81, Folder 5, Conversion, Israeli law, 1978.



March 21, 1978

said that he regretted having made the statement, and asked that his intervention "be forgotten" and put aside in considering the issue.

You should know, Moshe, that the reaction in the Christian community, as can be seen from the enclosed press clipping, has been extremely negative, and in some cases hostile. That concerns us because shortly after the amendment was publicized we received numerous calls from Christian leaders who have been among our most stalwart friends and allies on a whole range of Jewish concerns - supporters of Israel, people who marched in support of Soviet Jewry, key Catholics and Protestants who have devoted many years to combatting Christian anti-Semitism. The clarifying statement of Minister Tamir to Mr. Maass, which at the request of the Israeli Embassy we have widely circulated, has helped ease some of that anxiety among many of the Christians who have been in contact with us.

Given the difficulties that Israel has today in the political climate of America and the efforts of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish forces to erode even further support of Israel, we believe that it is important not to alienate those who have demonstrated their proven friendship and support, which we undoubtedly will need even more in the future than in the past.

In any event, it has been a long time since we have seen each other. How about breaking bread together sometime soon?

Best regards,

Cordially,



Bertram H. Gold

BHG/aw  
encs.

*Coverman*

February 7, 1978

Mr. Joseph Emanuel  
Executive Secretary  
The Israel Interfaith Committee  
12A Koresh Street  
P.O. Box 2028  
Jerusalem

Dear Joseph,

The issue is so serious that I would like to put in writing the suggestion previously made verbally.

In our earlier consultations, it turns out that you and I are agreed that the recent amendment to the Penal Code submitted by Knesset Member Abramowitz is a bad law, both in terms of its objectives as well as terminology. We also agreed that, as a matter of conscience, we could not defend this law to our interfaith and other-faith constituencies. But we will have to deal with the consequences of the law and their impact on interfaith relations.

The suggestion I made to you was that we join forces in deflecting this law from the direction in which it is heading, i.e., an issue of Jew versus Christian. Obviously, this is not the case at all. Rather, it is a question of human rights, religious liberty, sensitivity to minorities and freedom of speech.

I therefore suggested that we form a coalition of Jews, Christians and others who - together - will express their displeasure over the law. If such a coalition could include recognized, orthodox Jews, so much the better. This could be done in either one of two ways, or both: either a press conference called by such a coalition; or, taking out a full page ad both in the Hebrew and English press in which coalition members would sign, in their private capacities, if not as institutional representatives. In either case, the intent is to demonstrate how responsible Jews throughout the country join members of the Christian minority in taking exception to a bill that should never have been passed.

I enclose copies of this letter for Zvi and Shmaryahu and await your reaction and advice.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. M. Bernard Resnikoff  
Director, Israel Office

MOR:jw

bcc: Morris Fine

Bert Gold

Marc Tanenbaum ✓



JUN 29 1978

June 21, 1978

Morris Fine/George Gruen

M. Bernard Resnikoff

Keeping a promise that was made following the passage of the amendment to the criminal code (the so-called anti-mission bill) and because of a reported increase of harassment by extremist Jews on Hebrew Christians who, allegedly, interpreted the amendment as freedom to act, I convened a special meeting in the AJC office yesterday. Representing the United Christian Council in Israel was the Rev. Roy Kreider, Vice-Chairman and David Yegar, Chairman of the UCCI Public Relations Committee. Others in attendance were Joseph Emanuel, secretary of the Israel Interfaith Committee and Father Laurence Volken, chairman of the Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity in Israel.

The group fairly quickly agreed to a proposal I had formulated that the three Jerusalem-based organizations create and supervise a research effort that would undertake to establish the facts concerning accusations made in the Knesset and elsewhere of a reported rise of improper and misleading missionary activities. Such a team would establish liaison with the United Christian Council in Israel. All three organizations agreed equally to share such financial burdens as may come up. And, to do the staff work, I offered the temporary services of our colleague, Yaacov Pnini, whose credentials are suitable for this task and whose job load presently permits additional responsibilities on a short-term basis.

The idea itself was accepted soon enough and a decision was made to go ahead. However, because of sensitivities, because of feelings that are running high, because of anxiety caused by the introduction of what can fairly be described as vigilante groups who are said to be invading the homes of Hebrew Christians, it turned out that the UCCI had been doing its own homework and presented a three page draft proposal dated June 8 1978 (single copy attached).

It will be seen that this is an ambitious, extraordinary idea that would involve a number of international organizations and that will be concerned with a variety of related phenomena, including the suggestion that there be a simultaneous investigation of inferences that Jews are putting undue pressure on Christians to convert to Judaism.

No action was taken on the draft proposal at the time although, on a first quick reading, the whole idea leaves me cold. Still, I solicit the perspective of my colleagues, and especially Marc and his associates, as the concerned organizations in this country study the proposal further.

MBR:jw  
cc: Bert Gold  
IADV  
Encl. omitted

FEB 15 1978

February 12, 1978

Morris Fine

M. Bernard Resnikoff

As reported in advance by Time Magazine, and a number of times after the event by national radio, the long-awaited consultation (confrontation?) with Knesset Law Committee Chairman David Glass took place in the chambers of the Knesset Law Committee on February 8 with a delegation of Christian leaders in Israel.

Twelve Christian ministers were assembled for the purpose who gathered from Tel-Aviv, Jaffa and Jerusalem. All were Protestants, save for one Roman Catholic. Most were of American origin, but there were others from Great Britain, one from Norway and one from Finland. Most, but not all, are members of the United Christian Council in Israel.

Earlier, the group had accepted my suggestion that we meet in the Israel office some two hours before the scheduled consultation for a final check on objectives and procedures. I was pleased to note that they had planned for this meeting with me by bringing in a statement in writing. But I was not pleased by the speed with which they withdrew their written statement in favor of mine. Not only were their ideas at least as good as mine but, in the light of later events, I saw their submission to my agenda as evidence of group insecurity.

In any case, the agenda in the Israel office was completed, which included the following elements: reaching agreement on the objectives of the consultation which, put briefly, was to confine ourselves to legal issues since we were meeting with the Law Committee Chairman; setting up a system of priorities in the event there wasn't enough time for all questions to be answered; designating a spokesman; deciding what publicity was to be given to our efforts; and agreeing in advance to hold a meeting immediately following the conference in order to plan the next steps, to be based on the data learned.

Some of the questions we agreed to ask included the following:

1. What is the legal definition of certain critical terms in the amendment to the Penal Law - such as "change of religion", "entice", "material benefit"?
2. Cite specific examples of Christian activities currently under way and seek an opinion as to whether they are now criminal activities, such as:
  - (a) an ambulance from an American church for Magen David Adom
  - (b) free distribution of used clothing to the needy
  - (c) free copies of the New Testament in the Hebrew and English language
  - (d) phonograph records of sacred music
3. What clear and pressing problems was this law intended to solve?

4. How is a prosecutor to prove "a promise to give money" or "entice" a person to change religion without the invasion of privacy?
5. How does it happen that no Christian authority, nor officials of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, were invited to give testimony as the bill was being considered by the Law Committee?
6. It had been said that no one expects prosecution under the bill but that it was incorporated into the books simply as a kind of "warning". Does the Law Committee consider this a legitimate purpose for adding an amendment to the Criminal Code?
7. Categorically denying some of the charges made against unspecified Christian institutions in the Knesset debate on the law, what redress and what avenues of response are available to ordinary citizens to respond, keeping in mind that Knesset members enjoy immunity?
8. Are there, as has been alleged, plans to submit additional proposals to the Law Committee further prohibiting the free exercise of religious practice?
9. A bribe is legally offensive if it is intended to induce another person to perform a criminal act. But is conversion, as personally distasteful as it may be to the Jew, a criminal act? And should there not be additional amendments to the Criminal Code declaring illegal bribes offered to switch votes, to throw basketball games, to change dates on legal documents - incidents that are actually taking place?

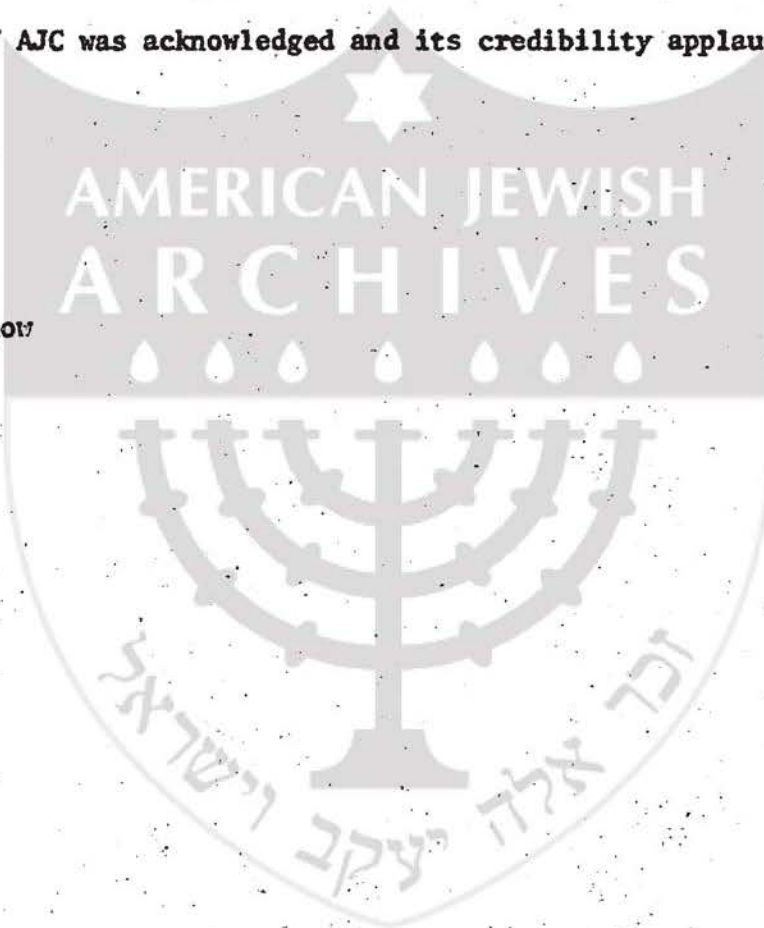
The session with the Law Committee Chairman, David Glass, took more than two-and-a-half hours. It was largely deliberative, but sometimes emotions spilled over. When we got down to the fine points (the Christians had done their homework - see their 23 page memorandum addressed to Prof. Aharon Barak, dated January 23, 1978, a copy of which was previously forwarded), Mr. Glass had to revert to the Hebrew language in order to be precise in his formulation. Despite the number of questions that were provocative - either accidentally or by design - I must say Mr. Glass deserves high credit for maintaining dispassion, answering questions patiently, graciously allowing interruptions and giving no indication at any time that he was running out of patience or time. The fact that he is former Director-General of the Ministry of Religious Affairs certainly helped him understand the currents and eddies that flowed through the chambers. Certainly, he did a more effective job of putting the case as well as possible for a law that is widely held to be a poor one. Certainly, his statements and explanations made more sense than an undated, unsigned, document entitled "Amendment to the Criminal Law - Tempting to Religious Conversion" - a single copy of which is attached and which is being distributed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The fresh data Mr. Glass shared with the group appears as an appendix to this report. Here, I want to confine myself to findings, conclusions and observations:

1. The group was mollified by a number of statements Mr. Glass made, but they are far from satisfied.
2. While it was made absolutely clear that the law will appear in the books and be argued in the courts entirely independent of the Knesset debate surrounding its adoption, it is equally clear that the group was deeply hurt by remarks made in the Knesset debate about Christian denominations and Church institutions, which the conference did nothing to ameliorate.



3. The conference was genuinely helpful but it did not alter the primary aim of the group - which is to get the bill repealed (not a chance).
4. Despit fact that some delegation members had lived in Israel ~~more~~ than ten years, this was the first time a number of them ever stepped into the Knesset. They were impressed. They responded positively when David Glass was successful in picking up my suggestion that we provide an English-speaking guide to show them through the Knesset when the conference was over. The psychological impact was enormous because of their (legitimate) complaints was that they were being ignored. Here they were being treated like VIP's and they responded accordingly.
5. The rold of AJC was acknowledged and its credibility applauded.

MBR:jw  
cc: Bert Gold  
IADV  
Abe Karlikov



### Confidential Addendum

When the consultation was over, we left the Knesset, and the group insisted upon meeting with me despite the late hour. It was finally agreed that all the cars bringing us back from the Knesset would assemble at the Baptist House parkinglot. There, standing in the middle of a semi-circle, the spokesman told me that, as a matter of good faith and reciprocal trust, they wanted me to know that a delegation of the Council would be leaving in a few days to meet with the Vatican, the World Council of Churches and Church leaders in Germany, England and France to share with the Europeans both their knowledge and disquiet about the amendment. I told them that they were free agents and were free to go wherever they want to, but suggested that the decision was just a little bit premature. Some of the arguments I gave: the process of authentic data collection was only begun, and not ended, with David Glass; a formal presentation had been made to the Attorney General and it might be a good idea for the receipt of a response before the delegation members go abroad; the very act of taking this problem abroad could antagonize many Israelis of good will who would otherwise identify with them in their complaints against the bill; this is not really an issue of the Christian community versus the State of Israel, as much as it is an issue of like-minded citizens of all denominations who join forces to fight against what is probably a bad law. The arguments impressed them, but apparently not enough, because they were determined to go ahead - mostly, it turns out, because they want to accomplish as much as possible before they run out of both steam and money.

All this information was given to me in friendship and in confidence. The moral problem was clear because I had no wish to betray that confidence but, on the other hand, saw a mission to Europe as a devastating and entirely unnecessary problem for Israel at a time when we have enough problems with Sadat and President Carter.

Having made my decision, I called the Attorney General and, over the phone, ascertained that he never did see the January 23 document addressed to him by the Council. Thereupon, I promptly requested and was immediately granted a meeting with him the next day, in which I told him, in professional confidence, what had happened and suggested that if, at least, he or his surrogate would call the Council chairman simply to acknowledge receipt of the document, to assure the Council that it is being studied and that there would be a conference about this shortly - that this might be enough to deter the delegation from leaving for Europe now.

The Attorney General agreed and promised to call that day the Council chairman, Na'em Ateek, an Israeli Arab who is a Canon in the Anglican Church. At this writing, it is not known what happened.

Appendix  
Fresh Information Provided by Mr. David Glass  
At the February 8, 1978 Consultation

1. It is ~~fact~~ctly true that certain terms in the amendment are legally unclear, and ~~the courts~~ courts will have to decide what their definitions are. In his own opinion, conversion, legally, can only take place when one converts to one of the established Churches, as recognized by the government, and not a movement.
2. Israel guarantees complete religious freedom and even goes further by doing such things as offering established Churches tax relief. The assumption is that in Israel there is complete freedom to change religion, despite the Knesset debate. Even though extremists would prohibit all kinds of missionary activities, the consensus in the Knesset is that, other than bribery, normal practices in a democratic society can be pursued.
3. Every country builds its own legal system, determining when an immoral act becomes criminal as well. In this case, the law was promulgated because of the apprehension of a ~~number~~ number of Knesset members who are concerned about growing activities by an admittedly small number of sects.
4. In a sense, the law defends freedom of religion. By making bribery unlawful, which can only damage the good name of the Christian establishment, people are now free to choose or change a religion by conviction.
5. It is not customary for the Law Committee to invite experts or concerned citizens to testify when a bill is being considered. Therefore, there was no malice when no Christian community was invited to testify. On the other hand, initiated requests to submit testimony are frequently honored.
6. It is quite true that in the Knesset debate, some ill-considered remarks were made about the Christian community by certain Knesset members. This Mr. Glass personally regretted. But, there is no legal way to control free debate but, at the same time, no legal weight is given to the debate.
7. As the one responsible for shepherding the bill through passage, Mr. Glass categorically denied that the bill was pushed through during the Christmas holiday when, allegedly, Christians would be distracted by the holiday season.
- 8., Mr. Glass personally doubted that a single case would come up in the next two years under the law. The purpose of the law is only one of deterrence.
9. Mr. Glass acknowledged that the sponsors of the bill were not happy with it, having preferred to forbid other kinds of activities. In a sense, Mr. Glass concurs with this view because he would have forbidden all kinds of deception, not only bribery. In any case, stronger legislation of any kind should not have been passed by the Knesset at the present time.
10. There is no proposed law before the Law Committee at the present time, nor is there any contemplation of such, that would limit freedom of religion.

COPY

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

Institute of Human Relations  
165 EAST 56 TH STREET NEW YORK 22, N.Y.

PARIS OFFICE

30, rue La Boétie  
Paris VIII

FO-Eur  
February 28, 1978

MEMORANDUM

To: Morris Fine  
From: Nives Fox  
Subj: Israel's new law against conversions

Reactions to Israel's new law against proselytism did not take long in coming.

Typical is that of Le Monde's, which quoted a member of the Council of Christians in Israel as having declared: "One cannot say that Christians enjoy religious freedom in Israel when certain groups can utilize Parliament to propagate <sup>their</sup> hatred."

Sources in Rome have expressed "preoccupation by the Holy See" concerning this law, says the paper; and adds that the Church will transmit these preoccupations through normal diplomatic channels as well as to the world Jewish community at the next meeting of the Catholic-Jewish Commission in Madrid. (The last reference surely means IJCIC.)

A delegation of the Council of Christians (an Anglican, a Lutheran and a Catholic) visited the Vatican last week, before going to Geneva and the Ecumenical Council of Churches. According to Le Monde, the delegation will present four points there, with Vatican approval. These are:

1. The law's vague terminology permits different interpretations, including the most hostile ones;
2. It was debated and adopted in the Knesset with an anti-Christian spirit;
3. It will incite integrists against Christian missions and encourage provocateurs to ensnare Christians only to accuse them of corruption afterwards;
4. It may be the prelude for other concessions to the majority's religious parties envisaged by Mr. Begin's government.

According to the article, the Vatican fears that this legislation will hurt the dialogue between religious communities, be an obstacle for coexistence in Palestine (sic) and for settling unsolved issues such as the status of Jerusalem and the Holy places. It is impossible to refuse evangelization as an a priori condition: "No Christian, or any man, can be stopped from sharing his convictions," the Vatican source is quoted as saying.

cc: Tanenbaum  
Resnikoff





# THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

Institute of Human Relations • 165 East 56 Street, New York, N.Y. 10022 • 212/751-4000 • Cable Wishcom, N.Y.

9 February 1978

The Honorable Shmuel Tamir  
Ministry of Justice  
Government of Israel  
Jerusalem  
Israel

Dear Mr. Minister:

I should like to draw your attention to the fact that the recent passage of the so-called "anti-missionary" amendment to the Penal Code has aroused serious concern and distress among Christian leaders in the United States, and particularly among those very leaders who have been Israel's staunchest friends and supporters in the American Christian community. It has been widely reported in the press and has been the subject of adverse comment in the Christian press especially.

Our Interreligious Affairs Department, which maintains an ongoing liaison with the organized Christian community in the United States, has received phone calls and letters from a number of highly-placed Roman Catholic, Protestant and Evangelical leaders conveying their dismay at the passage of this legislation, and raising questions about its intentions and its application. Similar dismay has been expressed in the Jewish community.

We share with other Jews the feeling of moral offense at proselytization, whose purpose is to undermine Judaism and the continuity of the Jewish people.

We are also aware that this amendment on its face is directed to the prevention of corruption and aimed at such abuses as bribery for the purpose of conversion. But the sweeping provisions of the law as enacted lend themselves to interpretations which go beyond the intention of the legislators. It appears intended to intimidate the Christian community in Israel and to impede it from the pursuit of normal philanthropic and educational activities. Given the intemperate and hostile remarks which accompanied the introduction of this legislation in the Knesset, there is apprehension that its ultimate goal is to drive the Christian communities from Israel.

.../2

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Page 2

The Honorable Shmuel Tamir

9 February 1978

In this connection may I call to your attention the enclosed two full-page statements that appeared as advertisements in the New York Times and elsewhere around the country, expressing the full support of Israel by the Evangelical Christian community and important elements within the Catholic Church. Such statements would not have appeared without a continuous and close working relationship between these Christian groups and their constituencies and Jewish communal agencies such as the American Jewish Committee and their memberships. And I must say to you privately that Israeli actions such as this "anti-missionary" law represent a serious obstacle to this kind of mutual trust and close relationship, and a consequent danger of the loss of the solid support Israel enjoys from these constituencies. Christian religious bodies cannot be expected to be unswerving admirers and supporters of Israel if in their view Israel is a state in which freedom of religion for all is not guaranteed and where their legitimate activities are proscribed or impeded.

In the face of the widespread concern over this development, we believe it important that government spokesmen in Israel reassure our Christian friends and neighbors as to Israel's unwavering commitment to freedom of religion and to the full exercise of the rights of the Christian minority in Israel. We believe that a statement from your office as to how the Ministry of Justice construes this law in its intention and application might mitigate the damage its passage has caused. May I call upon you for such a statement of clarification, for without it an unfortunate and inaccurate picture of Israel may well result.

Your prompt consideration will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely yours,



Richard Maass  
President

RM/ac  
Encs.

MAR 27 1978  
C/S

European Lutheran Commission  
on the Church and the Jewish People

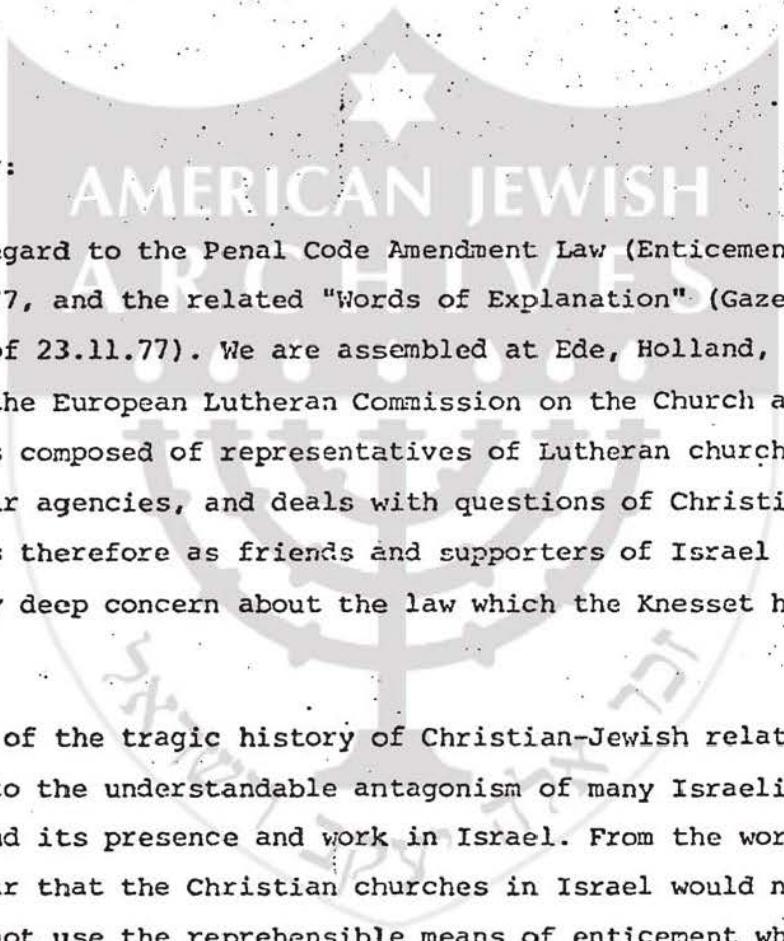
Chairman, Rev. Axel Torm  
Gardet 13  
DK-4600 Køge  
Denmark

Ede, Holland

February, 16, 1978

Prime Minister Menachem Begin  
Jerusalem  
Israel

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:



We write to you with regard to the Penal Code Amendment Law (Enticement to Change of Religion) 1977, and the related "Words of Explanation" (Gazette - Draft Laws - No. 1313 of 23.11.77). We are assembled at Ede, Holland, for the annual meeting of the European Lutheran Commission on the Church and the Jewish People, which is composed of representatives of Lutheran churches in Western Europe and their agencies, and deals with questions of Christian-Jewish relations. It is therefore as friends and supporters of Israel that we express to you our very deep concern about the law which the Knesset has recently enacted.

We are very much aware of the tragic history of Christian-Jewish relations. We are also sensitive to the understandable antagonism of many Israelis toward the Christian church and its presence and work in Israel. From the wording of the law, it would appear that the Christian churches in Israel would not be affected, since they do not use the reprehensible means of enticement which the law forbids. It is clear, however, from the reasons given for the law in the Knesset debate and from other statements by prominent Israelis, that this new law is in fact meant to address itself to the legitimate life and work of the Christian churches in Israel.

Moreover, the enactment of this law has already seriously damaged Jewish-Christian relations. We fear that further erosion of the good name of Israel will be forthcoming in our own countries and in world opinion generally. It is already apparent to Jews in many countries that the law contravenes the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 18 and 19, which Israel has endorsed, not to speak of Israel's own Declaration of Independence.

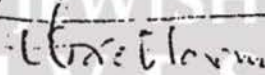


For the sake of the welfare of Israel, we urge the earliest possible repeal of this law.

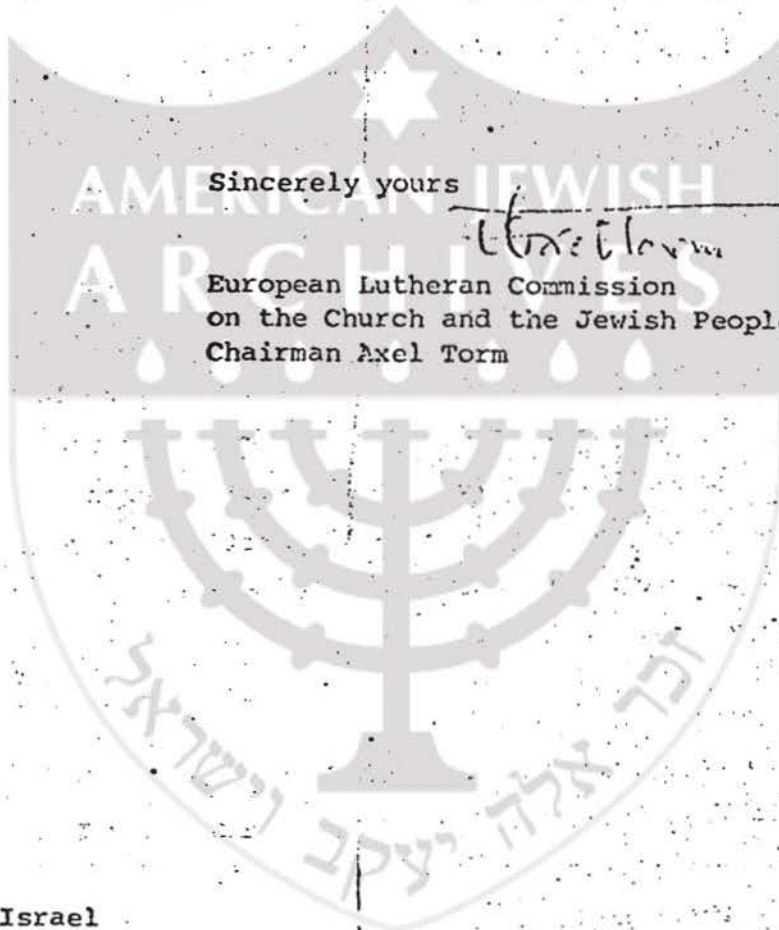
To avoid public resentment against Israel in our countries, we are not giving this letter to the press. Please do not underestimate, however, the gravity with which we regard this matter.

Assuring you of our respect, and with a wish for the peace and happiness of Israel, we remain

Sincerely yours



European Lutheran Commission  
on the Church and the Jewish People  
Chairman Axel Torm



cc: The President of Israel

The Minister of Foreign Affairs

The Minister of Religious Affairs

The Head, Ecclesiastical Affairs Department  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Director, Division of Christian Communities,  
Ministry of Religious Affairs

Dr. Gerhard Riegner, Executive Director, World Jewish Congress



# THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

SOUTHEAST REGION • 1699 Tullie Circle, N.E., Suite 118 • Atlanta, Georgia 30329 • 404/633-6351  
William A. Gralnick,  
Southeast Regional Director

Marc Tanenbaum

February 10, 1978

BAPTIST AND REFLECTOR  
P.O. Box 347  
Brentwood, TN 37027

To the Editor:

I would like to reply to your January 19 article headlined "new Israeli Law Threatens Nation's Religious Liberty". Nothing could be further from the truth. Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East, declared in her Declaration of Independence, "The State of Israel...will maintain complete equality of social and political rights for all its citizens without distinction of creed, race, or sex. It will guarantee freedom of religion and conscience, of language, education, and culture. It will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions." Israel has been true to this pledge.

For the record, this is not a law but a penal law amendment #5738 - 1977 (an enticement to change religion). The amendment relates directly to Article Two of Israel's Basic Principles (roughly equivalent to our Constitution) adopted in 1948 which reads, "The State will provide for the public religious needs of its inhabitants but will prevent coercion in matters of religion (emphasis added)." In recent years the coercion of new arrivals in Israel to become Christians has become a nagging problem. Promises of money and plane tickets to America or Canada are the inducements as opposed to the gospel. Worse still, these promises, made to tired, struggling immigrants seeking to adjust to a new home, are often unmet adding another dimension to an already questionable practice. The rationale for the amendment is this. In Western society, it is illegal to gain advantage by offering a bribe. This is merely an extension of that legal principle to religion.

Anyone familiar with Christianity understands the necessity of Christians to witness for their religion. Deceit and coercion, however, in the name of religion have been visited upon the Jews with alarming regularity and blood-chilling consequences - the Inquisition, the pogrom, and the Holocaust. That these techniques are diametrically opposed to the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth has been recognized and has been recently proclaimed by untold numbers of Christian scholars and theologians including Billy Graham and the Department of Interfaith Witness of the Baptist Home Mission Board.

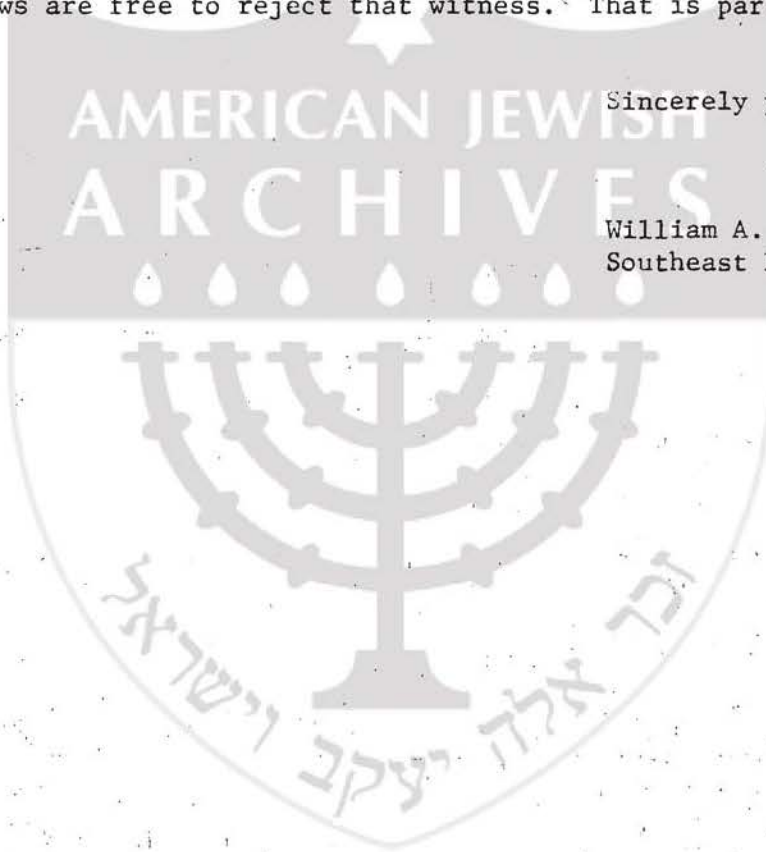
The Knesset has sought only to protect a people victimized all too long by the worst that human nature can conjure up. The Knesset has in no way compromised religious freedom, a freedom guaranteed in Israel and expressly denied by her Moslem neighbors. Christians are still free to witness. Jews are free to reject that witness. That is part of religious democracy.

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

Sincerely yours,

William A. Gralnick  
Southeast Regional Director

WAG/lm





# THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

Institute of Human Relations • 165 East 56 Street, New York, N.Y. 10022 • 212/751-4000 • Cable Wishcom, N.Y.

February 23, 1978

To: Members of the Board of Governors

From: Maynard I. Wishner, Chairman

I thought you would want to know that your mandate to the officers during our recent Board Institute has been carried out. Yehuda Avner, political adviser to Menachem Begin, was reached by telephone shortly after the conclusion of our Institute and informed of our deep concern over the apparent erosion of support in this country as a result of Israel's actions in continuing to authorize new settlements in the Sinai and on the West Bank. Mr. Avner promised to convey this message directly to the Prime Minister.

You will be interested to know that a few days ago the Presidents Conference also instructed Alex Schindler to carry a similar message to Mr. Begin, whom he was to meet in Israel this past Sunday. Bert Gold authorized Rabbi Schindler to represent the AJC's views as well during the course of his meeting.

Now we are deeply concerned over the Administration's proposal for a large-scale U.S. arms sale to Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The decision to sell fighter aircraft to Egypt represents a significant departure from U.S. policy and the proposal to make available to Saudi Arabia the most advanced of American military planes is of course most disturbing. Israeli officials are hopeful that further negotiations will restore the sharp cut in their request which they believe to be inconsistent with a prior U.S. commitment to be "fully responsive. . . to Israel's military requirements on an ongoing and long-term basis." We have advised our chapters of these concerns and have urged them to act accordingly.

You may have noted the recent publicity concerning the new Israeli law governing missionary activities. In that connection, you will be interested in Richard Maass' letter to Mr. Begin and the brief background memorandum on the subject prepared by our Foreign Affairs Department. Both are enclosed.

A summary of our discussions during the course of our recent Institute is now being prepared and will be sent to you shortly.

RICHARD MAASS, President ■  
MAYNARD I. WISHNER, Chairman, Board of Governors ■ MORTON K. BLAUSTEIN, Chairman, National Executive Council ■ HOWARD I. FRIEDMAN, Chairman, Board of Trustees ■  
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THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE

שר המשפטים

March 8, 1978

Mr. R. Maass  
President  
The American Jewish Committee  
165 East 56 Street  
New York, N.Y. 10022  
U. S. A.

Dear Mr. Maass,

I regret the delay in replying to your letter of February 9, 1978 which I have read with great interest.

I understand that a similar letter has been sent to the Prime Minister.

We have given a great deal of thought to your remarks and observations concerning the recently enacted law outlawing material enticement to change of religion. I should like to stress that the Government and the people of Israel are fully cognizant of and greatly appreciate the positive attitude and support of the many Christian religious bodies both in Israel and abroad to the State of Israel and the Jewish people. We, on our part have, over the years, striven to create mutual trust, respect and understanding between the different religious communities in Israel. Never have the various religious communities enjoyed such freedom of religious worship and freedom of access to the Holy Places as they do now under Israeli jurisdiction.

It is, therefore, with deep regret that we read of feelings of concern among people and institutions in the Christian community as expressed in your above letter.



- 2 -

I can assure you that there is no intention whatsoever on the part of the Israeli Government to restrict in any way religious freedom of the Christian community or any other community in Israel or to impede them from the pursuit of normal educational or philanthropic activities.

The underlying principles of our Declaration of Independence guarantee freedom of religion and conscience to all of Israel's citizens. Israel is also a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which by article 18 declares that everyone has the right to freedom of religion and conscience including the right to change his religion or belief. The State of Israel remains fully committed to uphold these fundamental principles. The law to which you refer is merely intended to prohibit the promising or the giving of material benefits in consideration for a change of religion.

As you have referred to the totally unfounded and imaginary apprehension in some circles that there may be an intention to drive out Christians from this country, I feel duty bound to quote the law in question as passed by the Knesset:

- "1. Whosoever gives or promises to a person money, money's worth or some other material benefit in order to induce him to change his religion or in order that he may induce another person to change his religion is liable to imprisonment for five years or a fine of 50,000 pounds.



- 3 -

2. Whosoever receives or agrees to receive money, money's worth or some other material benefit in return for a promise to change his religion or to cause another person to change his religion is liable to imprisonment for a term of three years or a fine of 30,000 pounds."

AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES  
May I point out that a prevailing feeling which forms part of the background to the enactment of this Law is that in this generation the Jewish people have lost more than six million men, women and children in the holocaust. Thus have the veins of vital blood of the overall Jewish body been partly dried up. This painful and alarming situation has therefore brought about a natural desire to see to it that no people will be lost to the Jewish faith in an undue and unjustified process. While we all share the opinion that any faith or belief should be a matter of free personal consideration and choice, we are convinced that any attempt to buy souls by means of material inducements is incompatible with elementary human and religious principles.

It is in these circumstances and in this spirit that the law was passed by the Israeli Knesset. Needless to say, the law applies equally to all religions.



THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE

שר המשפטים

- 4 -

May I add two points relating to the application of this law. Firstly, that in view of the nature of the matter, instructions have been given by the Attorney General that no action or even inquiry be instituted by virtue of this law without the prior direct authorisation of the Attorney General in person or the State Attorney in person. Secondly, in the final analysis, the interpretation of the law is a matter for the Israeli courts, whose independence and reputation for the highest standards of judicial integrity are beyond question.

With kindest personal regards,

SHMUEL TAMIR  
MINISTER OF JUSTICE





Rabbi M. Tannenbaum



AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

with

the Compliments of

Mr. David P.

Jan. 25/1978

הקונסוליה הכללית של  
ישראל בניו-יורק

CONSULATE GENERAL  
OF ISRAEL IN NEW YORK

800 SECOND AVENUE  
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10017

OXFORD 7-5500

February 6, 1978

David Glass, M.K.  
Chairman, Law Committee  
The Knesset  
Jerusalem

Delivered by hand

Dear David,

Following the conference you had some weeks ago with me and with Dr. David Clayman of the American Jewish Congress concerning the amendment to the Penal Code, you graciously consented at that time to meet with concerned Christians in Israel to interpret to them the objectives and specifications of the law. Thereafter, an arrangement has been set up for a consultation to take place at the Knesset on Wednesday, February 8 at 11:30 a.m.

I now attach a list of delegates who are planning to attend the consultation. Their ID or passport numbers are included in order to facilitate entry into the Knesset. It will be helpful for you to know that I will be escorting them into the Knesset, for which I already have my own badge of admission.

You will be impressed, as I was, by the number of people desiring to attend the consultation and the distances from which they are coming, in order to attend the meeting, including Canon Na'ern Ateek who resides in Haifa. This is still further evidence for the need for authoritative interpretation of the bill, which is precisely why Dr. Clayman and I are so grateful that you agreed so promptly to meet with them.

I also enclose, for your advance study, a 23 page memorandum dated January 23, 1978 that the United Christian Council in Israel prepared for Prof. Aharon Barak. I only managed to receive a copy of this the other day and I decided to get it to you as swiftly as possible, so that you, in turn, can plan to make the most effective use of our time together. You should also know that the two yellow pages at the end of the memorandum were distributed to the press by the UCCI at a press conference that took place in Tel-Aviv last week.

I need hardly tell you, David, what a stir this law has created. It was the only item on the agenda when a group of concerned Christians met privately with the Minister of Religious Affairs last week. It was cited in the response to a major address that the Prime Minister gave to a convention of 500 evangelicals at the Diplomat hotel. The Vatican and the World Council of

Churches have initiated inquiries, friendly churches in Europe have asked their representatives to stop distributing charitable gifts until the law is clarified. One church in California is withholding the delivery of an ambulance for the Magen David Adom until assurances are made. These are some of the reasons why the consultation with you is so desirable and we look forward to your expert knowledge in helping to mollify our many Christian friends.

Should you wish to reach me before the Wednesday consultation, after hours, my home telephone number is 38279.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. H. Bernard Resnikoff  
Director, Israel Office

MBR:jw

cc: Morris Fine  
Marc Tanenbaum ✓  
Bert Gold



February 3, 1978

Morris Fine

M. Bernard Resnikoff

A friend in the American embassy gave me an advance copy of a document issued by the United Christian Council in Israel prepared for Prof. Aharon Barak in which it takes up the amendment to the Penal Code.

The document is enclosed. The last two pages in yellow were distributed at a press conference in Tel Aviv on January 31 in which the UCCI spokesman pressed for the establishment of an international commission of inquiry to investigate religious conversions in Israel, in the expectation that the Knesset is planning to pass additional stringent laws.

I find the document a formidable piece of work and it is bound to have an impact based on the homework somebody did. My information is that the bulk of homework was done by the Reverend Knight, who resides in Jaffa, who is pro-Israeli but also a passionate fundamentalist. This document is worth careful study by our department as well as by Marc and his staff. And it may interest you and Marc to know that having gone through the entire document, line by line, I have not found any statements of alleged fact that are not.

In consultation with the leadership of UCCI, I received their agreement to give a copy of this document to David Glass, Chairman of the Knesset Law Committee, in advance of the consultation previously arranged for him and representative Protestant leaders in the U.S. that will take place on February 8 at the Knesset. The purpose of giving him the document in advance is in order for him to understand the Protestant concerns and to make the consultation as meaningful as possible.

If you or Marc have any reactions to this memorandum, I would be glad to receive them.

MBR:jw

cc: IAD ✓

Bert Gold

February 2, 1978

Dr. Jeonathan Pratto  
Director, Church Relations Division  
Ministry for Foreign Affairs  
Hakiryah Romema  
Jerusalem

Dear Dr. Pratto,

Representative of the response abroad to the recent amendment to the Penal Code, is the attached copy of an article that appeared in the January 18 issue of Baptist Standard.

I am very much afraid that the law, or misinformation about the law, if you like, is alienating some of the strongest Christian supporters of Israel. I would like to put in writing the suggestion I have already made verbally that the Ministry, with your indispensable aid, launch a major program of interpretation that might put the best foot forward on a law which, in the opinion of many, including this writer, should not have been passed.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. M. Bernard Resnikoff  
Director, Israel Office

MBR:jw  
Encl. article omitted

bcc: Morris Fine  
Tanenbaum/Gibel ✓

*Maass - Shmuel*  
*Sam Lewis*

DRAFT LETTER FROM RICHARD MAASS TO SHMUEL TAMIR

Dear Mr. Minister:

(First paragraph of amenities to be provided by George Gruen.)

*We*  
I should like to draw your attention to the fact that the recent passage of the so-called "anti-missionary" amendment to the Penal Code has aroused serious concern and distress among Christian leaders in the United States, and particularly among those very leaders who have been Israel's staunchest friends and supporters in the American Christian community. *It has been widely reported in the press & has been the subject of adverse comment in the New Press especially.* Our Interreligious Affairs Department, which maintains an ongoing liaison with the organized ~~church~~ *Christian* community in the United States, ~~reports that it~~ *and publications* has received phone calls, ~~and~~ *and* letters, ~~from a number of highly-placed Roman Catholic, and Protestant leaders conveying their dismay at the passage of this legislation, and raising questions about its intentions and its application.~~ *Similar dismay has been expressed in the Jewish community.*

We are aware that this amendment <sup>on its face</sup> is directed to the prevention of corruption and aimed at such abuses as bribery for the purpose of conversion. ~~But loosely~~ *It appears intended* interpreted, ~~might it not be used to intimidate the Christian community in Israel and impede it from the pursuit of normal philanthropic and educational activities?~~ *to* Given the intemperate and hostile remarks which accompanied the introduction of this legislation into the Knesset, there is ~~an~~ *Communities* apprehension that its ultimate goal is to drive the Christian ~~presence~~ *presence* from Israel.

In the face of the widespread concern over this development, we believe it important to reassure our Christian friends and neighbors, *that our spokesmen* *and us as well* as to Israel's unwavering

*But the sweeping provisions of the law as enacted lead themselves to interpretations which go beyond the intention of the legislators.*

commitment to freedom of religion and to the full exercise of the rights of the Christian minority in Israel. We believe that a statement from your office as to how the Ministry of Justice construes this law in its intention and application ~~would be extremely helpful at this time.~~ <sup>might mitigate the damage its passage has caused</sup> May ~~I~~ <sup>we</sup> call upon you for such a statement of clarification <sup>for without it an unfortunate & irreparable rift in Israel may well result.</sup> Your prompt consideration will be greatly appreciated.

Most sincerely yours,

*Miles Jaffe*  
 National Chairman  
 Interreligious Affairs Commission

Richard Maass  
 President

(copies of draft to: Morris Fine, Inge Gibel, George Gruen, A. James Rudin, Marc H. Tanenbaum, Morton Yarmon)

- In this connection may I call your attention to  
 Enclosed 2 <sup>free</sup> page statements of <sup>Orthodox & Catholic</sup> Councils  
 Mutual trust - close relationship  
 Full support of Israel  
 Jewish State would not have appeared without  
 Continuous Relationship  
 Represent Jewish State to support

Package given to Bert Fred  
Richman





DRAFT LETTER FROM RICHARD MAASS TO SHMUEL TAMIR

Dear Mr. Minister:

(First paragraph of amenities to be provided by George Gruen.)

I should like to draw your attention to the fact that the recent passage of the so-called "anti-missionary" amendment to the Penal Code has aroused serious concern and distress among Christian leaders in the United States, and particularly among those very leaders who have been Israel's staunchest friends and supporters in the American Christian community.

Our Interreligious Affairs Department, which maintains an ongoing liaison with the organized church community in the United States, reports that it has received phone calls and letters from a number of highly-placed Roman Catholic and Protestant leaders conveying their dismay at the passage of this legislation, and raising questions about its intentions and its application.

We are aware that this amendment is directed to the prevention of corruption and aimed at such abuses as bribery for the purpose of conversion. But loosely interpreted, might it not be used to intimidate the Christian community in Israel and impede it from the pursuit of normal philanthropic and educational activities? Given the intemperate and hostile remarks which accompanied the introduction of this legislation into the Knesset, there is an apprehension that its ultimate goal is to drive the Christian presence from Israel.

In the face of the widespread concern over this development, we believe it important to reassure our Christian friends and neighbors as to Israel's unwavering

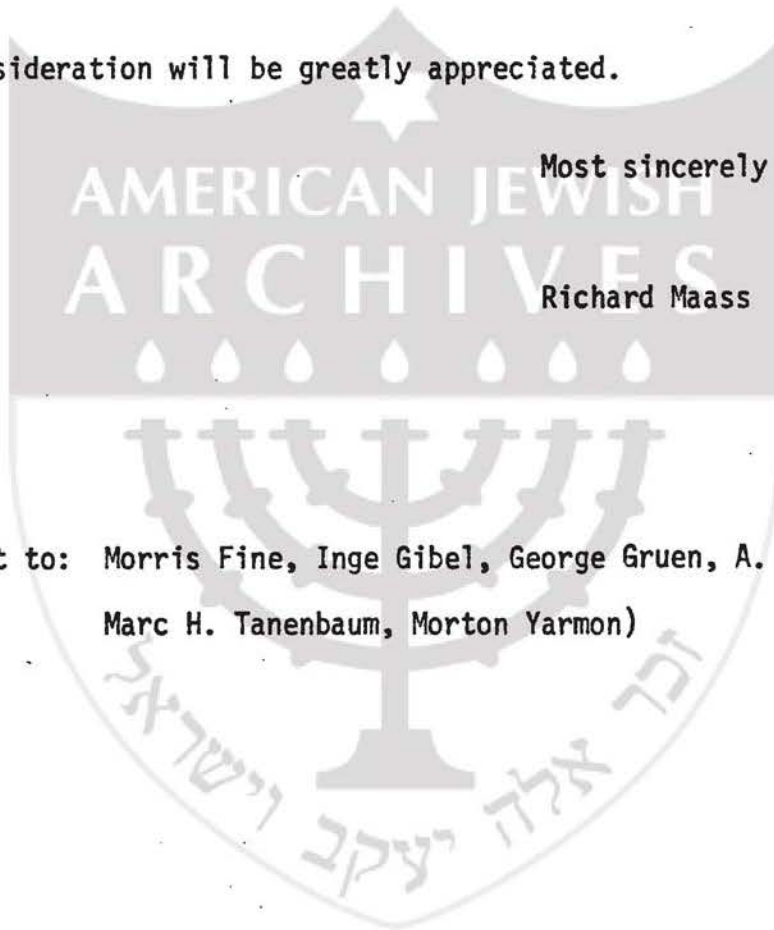
commitment to freedom of religion and to the full exercise of the rights of the Christian minority in Israel. We believe that a statement from your office as to how the Ministry of Justice construes this law in its intention and application would be extremely helpful at this time. May I call upon you for such a statement of clarification?

Your prompt consideration will be greatly appreciated.

Most sincerely yours,

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES  
Richard Maass

(copies of draft to: Morris Fine, Inge Gibel, George Gruen, A. James Rudin,  
Marc H. Tanenbaum, Morton Yarmon)





# THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

Institute of Human Relations • 165 East 56 Street, New York, N.Y. 10022 • 212/751-4000 • Cable Wishcom, N.Y.

February 28, 1978

TO: Members of the Foreign Affairs Commission

FROM: Morris Fine

On return from my vacation, I found a number of important and interesting items that I want to share with you covering recent developments and AJC activities. They are as follows:

- (1) Memorandum entitled "An Israeli View on Peace and Security" which was prepared and made available to us by a veteran Israeli diplomat in Western Europe. This is one of the best interpretations of Israeli policy and actions that has come to our attention.
- (2) "Israel and the Occupied Territories," the text of the State Department's report on human rights in Israel. You may have seen some distorted versions of this report in the press and I therefore think it is important that you read the full text. Note especially the marked passages.
- (3) FAD memorandum on "AJC Efforts Regarding the New Israeli Law Prohibiting Certain Missionary Activities," the text of the letter by Richard Maass to Prime Minister Begin, and the text of a New York Times story of February 14 on the same subject.
- (4) Text of Maynard Wishner's letter to the Board of Governors of February 23.
- (5) Memorandum from Rabbi James Rudin to Rabbi Marc Tannenbaum of January 30th reporting on his visit to Belgrade as part of the National Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry. This mission is the latest in a series of activities in which AJC has been involved in connection with the Helsinki and Belgrade Conferences from the very earliest stages. We have been especially concerned with the

.../2

RICHARD MAASS, President ■  
MAYNARD I. WISNER, Chairman, Board of Governors ■ MORTON K. BLAUSTEIN, Chairman, National Executive Council ■ HOWARD I. FRIEDMAN, Chairman, Board of Trustees ■  
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ALFRED H. MOSES, Washington, D.C.; ELAINE PETSCHKE, Westchester; MERVIN H. RISEMAN, New York; RICHARD E. SHERWOOD, Los Angeles; SHERMAN H. STARR, Boston ■

adoption and wide dissemination of the Human Rights provisions of the Helsinki Final Act. Abraham Karlikow, the Director of our European Office and Sidney Liskofsky, Director of the International Organizations Division of the FAD, have devoted much of their time to this effort.

- (6) Text of Maynard Wishner's letter to the Board of Governors of February 23.

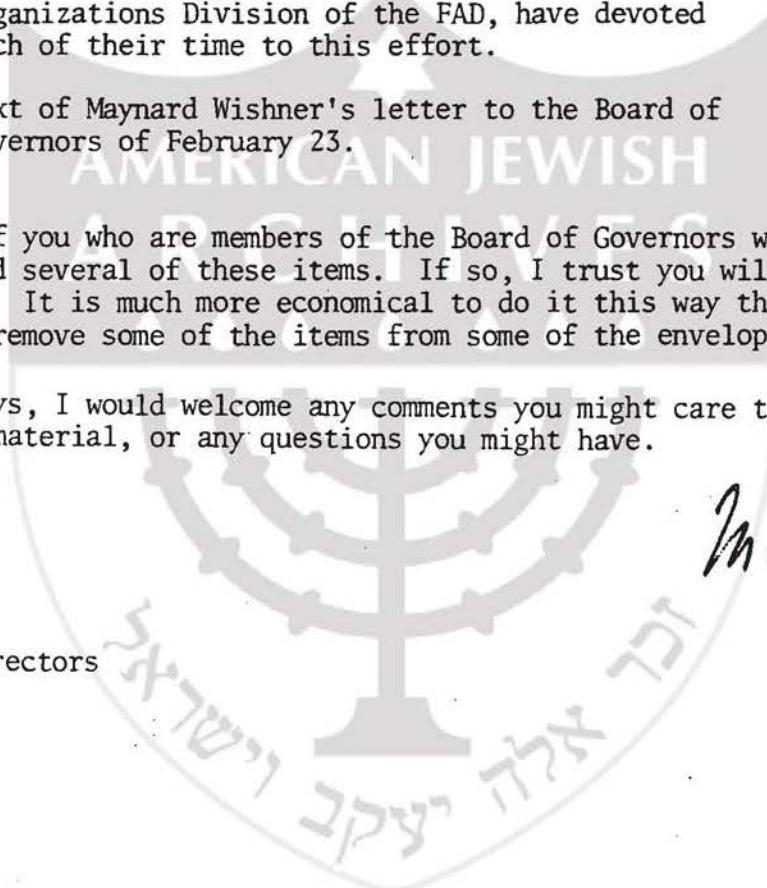
Those of you who are members of the Board of Governors will already have received several of these items. If so, I trust you will excuse this duplication. It is much more economical to do it this way than to take the time to remove some of the items from some of the envelopes.

As always, I would welcome any comments you might care to make on any of this material, or any questions you might have.

MF/ac  
Encs.

cc: Area Directors  
SAC

78-550-18



*M. J.*

March 1, 1978

Morris Fine

M.B. Resnikoff

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

Following our telephone conversation, I enclose a copy of the March 1 letter delivered by hand to Yehiel Kadishai to solicit an early response to Richie Maass's letter to him. The letter was addressed to Yehiel and forwarded this way after consultations with Moshe Yegar.

Overtures to other ministries, including the Ministry of Justice, of Religious and Foreign Affairs, had previously been initiated as per copies of my letters previously forwarded to you.

Best regards.

MBR:jw

cc: Bert Gold

Marc Tanenbaum ✓

Enclosure

March 1, 1978

Mr. Yehiel Kadishai  
Head, Prime Minister's Bureau  
Prime Minister's Office  
Kiryat Ben-Gurion  
Jerusalem

Delivered by hand

Dear Yehiel,

By this time you must have seen the February 9 letter my president, Mr. Richard Maass, sent the Prime Minister in which we solicit a statement calculated to reduce the negative impressions, among our Christian friends, of the recent amendment to the Penal Code.

For your convenience, an extra copy of that letter is attached. You should also know that a comparable letter was also sent to the Minister of Justice.

I bring all this to your attention at this time because of an urgent recommendation that emerged in my last telephone conversation with New York. When the Prime Minister arrives in the U.S. on March 13, he should be free to concentrate his time and attention on the primary purpose of the visit. We believe that overtures to him by the Church authorities, by the Christian and general media and by others concerning the implications of this amendment could be successfully deflected if the statement we solicit could be prepared by you and released by us in advance of the Prime Minister's visit.

To this end, I am arranging for this letter to be delivered by hand and am at your disposal at any time to assist you in implementing this suggestion.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. M. Bernard Resnikoff  
Director, Israel Office

MBR:jw  
Enclosed letter  
cc: Moshe Yegar

February 27, 1978

Mr. Fred Weisgal  
External Relations Division  
Ministry of Justice  
29 Saleh El Din Street  
Jerusalem

Dear Fred,

I have been keeping you informed of the activities of this office with respect to the Amendment to the Penal Law. Also, in consultation with you, I have spoken to the Attorney General and to Attorney Tamar Golan with respect to the clarification of the law, with special references to legal definitions.

Now I enclose a copy of a February 9 letter that our president, Richard Maass sent to your Minister which, in effect, formalizes the initiatives already taken. For your information, a comparable letter under the same date, was sent to the Prime Minister.

It is our hope that, armed with this official letter from our president, you will use your good offices to arrange for the early promulgation of the statement of explanation that is being solicited.

If I can provide you with further information or if there are additional ways in which I can accelerate this process, I am at your disposal, as always.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. M. Bernard Resnikoff  
Director, Israel Office

MBk:jw  
enclosed letter

bcc: Bert Gold  
Morris Fine  
IAD ✓

March 5, 1978

"ISRAEL'S ANTI-MISSIONARY LAW"

WINS RELIGION COMMENTARY

RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM\* OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

"That which is hateful to you do not inflict on your neighbor." That compelling teaching of the original Golden Rule pronounced by the great first-century Rabbi Hillel was very much on the mind of many Jewish leaders in recent days as they contemplated the implications of the so-called "anti-missionary law" in Israel. Sponsored by the Orthodox Agudat Israel party, this law which goes into effect on April 1, makes it an offense punishable by five years' imprisonment to use bribery or to offer anyone material benefits to convert from his or her religion. Accepting the offer to convert is punishable by a three-year term or fine. While the law does not mention missionaries, a statement in the Knesset by an Agudah rabbi stated that missionary organizations were using financial inducements and bribes especially among the Jewish poor in Israel to convert them from their religion. The United Christian Council in Israel has protested against the law arguing that it could be misused in restricting religious liberty. The Christian community should know that many influential Jewish leaders both in Israel and the United States share their concerns and strongly oppose this law. But let there be no misunderstanding. The Jewish community shares the Agudah's feeling of moral offense at proselytization whose purpose is to undermine Judaism. But the sweeping provisions of the law could compromise the civil liberties of legitimate Christian bodies, and we have communicated our opposition to the highest authorities in Israel. Jews have suffered more than enough from denial of religious liberty, and will not allow such denial to be inflicted on others, especially in a Jewish state.

---

\*Rabbi Tanenbaum, who is National Director of Interreligious Affairs of the American Jewish Committee, presents a weekly religion commentary over WINS-Westinghouse Broadcasting System.



**THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE**

**date** March 24, 1978  
**to** Marc Tanenbaum  
**from** Ira Silverman  
**subject** Staff Cabinet Follow-up: Backgrounder on Christian Response to Israeli Conversion Law

As you will recall, a suggestion was made at our recent Staff Cabinet meeting that we prepare a background paper on Christian response (statements, Christian press articles and editorials, etc.) to the Israeli conversion law.

I don't know whether you have moved on this -- it was specifically suggested that Judy be assigned to work on it -- but it seemed like a good idea and I would appreciate knowing what's in the works.

*Marcus*  
*Ira*

IS:ls

