



Jewish Democratic Initiative
1 May 2020

Mary Kluk
National President
South African Jewish Board of Deputies

Dear Mary,

Re: Israeli Annexation of Occupied Palestinian Territories

We trust you are well and staying healthy. We appreciate the leadership role provided by the SAJBD in engaging with the pandemic in our community and beyond.

Whilst much attention is, understandably, focused on COVID-19, we are deeply concerned about the Israeli coalition agreement that was signed on 20 April 2020, which paves the way to a unilateral Israeli annexation of part of the Occupied Palestinian Territories on the West Bank of the Jordan river.

As Jews deeply committed to our Jewish identity and to seeing Israel flourish on the terms set in its own Declaration of Independence, we believe that unilateral annexation is not only morally unjust, illegal under international law and fundamentally undemocratic, but is dangerous to Israel and Jews internationally. The rationale for these claims can be summarised as follows:

- The pathway to peace and security for The State of Israel is a negotiated settlement between Israelis and Palestinians. Unilateral action on the part of Israel in asserting sovereignty over Palestinian territory abrogates this basic principle of negotiation. Annexation will exacerbate tension between Palestinians and Israelis in the short term while excluding the possibility of a future long-term settlement agreement;
- UN General Assembly Resolution 181 of 29 November 1947, which paved the way for Israel's independence, mandated the creation of two states between the Jordan and the Mediterranean. Annexation contradicts this foundational Resolution;

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- Israel occupied the West Bank in the Six Day War and is prohibited under international law from unilaterally annexing it. Doing so would constitute an act of aggression which the Rome Statute defines as an international crime;
- Annexation poses serious threats to Israel's democratic character. Even if resident Palestinians in the annexed areas will be accorded full political rights (which is far from certain), the boundaries of those areas are demarcated to exclude as many Palestinians as possible whilst continuing their indefinite subjection to military rule;
- Israel's security is strongly supported by its peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan and by co-operation with the Palestinian Authority. Annexing parts of the West Bank would imperil these agreements and create new threats to Israel's security;
- Annexation could imperil the position of Jews in South Africa. The resulting international condemnation will inevitably strengthen the position of anti-Israel organisations such as the BDS movement. This is a particular concern in South Africa where it is already strong. We anticipate an upsurge in antisemitism placing the South African Jewish community in a conflictual situation vis-à-vis our fellow citizens.

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) is the representative spokesperson of Jews in South Africa. It is tasked with defending our civil rights, to promote the safety and welfare of Jews, to combat antisemitism and to enhance positive relations between the Jewish community with the rest of South Africans. **We believe all these aims will be significantly undermined by the planned annexation.**

There are members of our community who are uncritically loyal to the government of Israel, believing this to be supportive. In this instance uncritical support is counterproductive. The most pro-Israel position to take is to actively announce our opposition to the proposed illegal and fundamentally undemocratic annexation.

This is a watershed moment for the SAJBD and Jewish organisations around the world. It is imperative to rise to the challenge of our times and lead the community to oppose an illegal, undemocratic and immoral policy direction in Israel. In doing so we join the many Jewish organisations internationally who oppose annexation and support their government's opposition to the annexation proposal. The governments of the UK, France, Germany, the EU and many more countries have already issued strong denunciations. There is widespread condemnation from Jewish organisations in the USA with more to come. South African Jewry's voice must be heard.



The SAJBD officially supports a two-state solution – it cannot logically maintain that support without opposing annexation. Unilateral annexation is antithetical to a negotiated two- state solution. They are mutually exclusive concepts.

We therefore call on the SAJBD to publicly clarify its strong opposition to annexation.

JDI is committed to opposing annexation and hopes to work with the SAJBD in this regard. We would be happy to meet to co-ordinate activities. Since we are building a campaign at present and given the firm deadline in Israel, we would appreciate a response on the SAJBD's position by next Friday 8th May 2020.

Kind regards,

Basil Dubb
Chairperson JDI

May 12th 2020

Dear Raymond and Basil

The SAJBD's position on Israel is that it supports its right to exist as a Jewish state alongside a viable Palestinian state, in peace and security.

We do not, however, take a stance, whether for or against, concerning specific policy decisions of the Israeli government.

Regards

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