

CELEBRATING ISRAEL'S 60th ANNIVERSARY

Approved By The Annual Meeting

Washington, DC
May 4, 2008

On the occasion of the 60th year of Israel's modern existence as a state, we salute the Israeli people for their achievements and steadfastness in the face of adversity. As Americans and as Jews, we are proud of Israel's achievements. We pledge our continued support to Israel's growth, prosperity, and stability.

ENERGY INDEPENDENCE

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RESOLVED

The American Jewish Congress calls on the Congress of the United States and the President to support measures to increase energy conservation and reduce America's dependence on imported oil. Among the provisions that we urge our government to enact are:

1. Encourage manufacturers to produce public and private vehicles equipped with technology that would permit them to use alternative fuel sources.
2. Measures to ensure that alternative energy can be produced without causing food prices to skyrocket, and with ecological and environmental sensitivity and that do not cause further global warming.
3. Tax credits and other incentives to encourage new technology for energy efficiency.
4. Funding for section 917 of the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007.

The American Jewish Congress will commit its maximum efforts to adoption of these measures, including the marshalling of the resources of the entire Jewish community toward this end.

ACTING TO STOP GENOCIDE IN DARFUR

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The American Jewish Congress urges the President of the United States and the Congress to act immediately to stem the genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan by imposing a no-fly-zone in the critical areas affected. This should be done in consultation with the humanitarian organizations working on the ground in the region to prevent any counterproductive complications.

ISRAEL AND THE FALASH MORA

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The American Jewish Congress calls upon the Government of Israel to expeditiously process requests to immigrate from Falash Mora, thousands of whom continue to languish in camps and refugee centers in Ethiopia for the sin of wanting to live in Israel. In 2005, Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom promised to complete the evacuation of Falash Mora by the end of 2007. The Israeli government later extended the deadline to the end 2008. We encourage Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to meet this timeline. Regardless of when their ancestors may have converted to Christianity, or the conditions under which they did so, we support these people who desire to undergo conversion and live as Jews in Israel.

The country that managed to evacuate Beta Israel from Ethiopia in Operations Moses and Solomon must find the compassion and courage to bring willing new converts to its shores.

CHURCH-STATE SEPARATION

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The campaign *du jour* against the separation of church and state is a concerted effort to overturn state constitutional amendments (so-called Blaine Amendments) which sharply limit state financial aid to religious institutions. We pledge to defend those amendments.

When the Federal Constitution's ban on establishing religion was given a generous reading by the Supreme Court—often in cases brought by AJCongress—these state provisions were of secondary importance. Now that the Establishment Clause's effectiveness has been reduced so that it requires little more than equal treatment of religion and secular supplicants for government largesse, these provisions have taken on renewed importance as guarantors of religious liberty.

Those who want to see increased government funding for religious institutions have mounted an attack on state bans, alleging that they (a) impermissibly discriminate against religion; (b) penalize citizens for exercising their religious liberty; and (c) are rooted in 19th century anti-Catholicism. Each of these claims has been made for a half-century or more. We find them no more persuasive today than they have been in the past.

AJCongress is participating as a friend of the court in a major challenge to Blaine Amendments pending in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit, and it will shortly be filing in another such case in Kentucky. In Florida, we helped derail one effort at a state commission charged with proposing constitutional amendments to explicitly allow state funding of non public schools, including religious schools. Although we lost a second battle at the Commission with regard to a different provision banning aid to any religious institution, we are currently preparing to defeat that proposal at the polls.

The battle over church-state separation involves attacks on, and defenses of, the same principle. Tactics and battlefields, however, change. Today's church-state battlefield is the Blaine Amendment. We pledge to defend those state constitutions which impose greater restrictions on aid to religious institutions than the federal constitution, whether this means litigation or resisting efforts to amend state constitutions. Our long and proud organizational commitment to religious liberty requires no less.

**REQUIRING THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO ABIDE BY
THE INTERNATIONAL DEFINITION OF TORTURE, BAN
TORTURE, AND REFUSE TO USE ANY INFORMATION
OBTAINED BY THAT TORTURE**

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Based upon the AJCongress mission statement and whereas the government of the United States of America:

- holds itself out as a leader in defending human rights in the world;
- has a prohibition in its own Constitution barring cruel and unusual punishment;
- is a signatory to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 which compromise much of what is called International humanitarian law, and which bans torture including techniques like water boarding;
- is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which bans torture including techniques like water boarding;
- is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which bans torture including techniques like water boarding;
- is a signatory to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which bans torture including techniques like water boarding;
- has already admitted to three instances of water boarding;
- allowed Abu Ghraib to happen;
- is cognizant of military intelligence and law enforcement officials who believe that torture does not produce reliable information;
- has studied and recognizes that humane and sophisticated interrogations can be and have been effective in eliciting critical information;
- should be concerned with its image in the world;
- should be concerned with what might happen to its own captured combatants by those who might justify torture of them based upon American policies; and,
- has prosecuted, convicted and imprisoned war criminals for violating torture as defined in the above cited documents.

WHEREAS, the Supreme Court of the State of Israel, a nation on the frontlines of terrorism for its entire history, has banned its military from using torture on people held in custody by its government;

Whereas, as reported by JTA, “the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Reform movement’s rabbinical arm, passed a resolution calling on the government to ensure that U.S. laws against torture are enforced, and called for an independent commission to investigate reports of U.S. interrogation practices in the war on terrorism. The resolution also called on the U.S. government to follow a Supreme Court ruling that it is unconstitutional to imprison a person as an ‘enemy combatant’ without a right to a court hearing, and said every person in U.S. custody should be allowed visits by the Red Cross.”

BE IT RESOLVED, the American Jewish Congress, with deep concern for effective intelligence balanced by a civilized and moral government, demands, on behalf of all human beings of conscience, and the future generations of Americans who would otherwise have to pay the price for inaction, that the government of the United States of America:

- abide by the international definition of torture as created and previously agreed to in the above cited documents;
- ban the use of all torture - including all forms of water torture;
- refuse to use any information obtained by prior uses of torture to justify the continued imprisonment of any human being;
- pass legislation that supports this policy, without exception or obfuscation; and,
- ensure that its laws against torture are properly taught to any government official who may come in contact with prisoners.

Further, AJCongress demands that the federal government provide every person imprisoned as an “enemy combatant” with regular visits by independent humanitarian organizations to guarantee their health.

As an organization that is proud to call itself “The Attorney General for the Jewish people,” we must speak out in defense of the law and in favor of its use to defend minority rights and the unpopular. For years now, America has watched as legal opinions written by self-interested attorneys in the White House and, even, the Attorney General of the United States, compromise the law and those rights. Those policies must be changed.

IRAN

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Iran continues to pose a mortal threat to Israel, moderate Arab governments and America and the West, whose hegemony Iran seeks to challenge, regionally if not globally. Iran is also quite vocal about challenging Israel's very existence, and certainly its position as the regional superpower and, in the event that its threats are realized, to eliminate Israel as a state.

Evidence continues to underscore the danger that Iran is continuing to work towards the development of nuclear weapons. Despite a judgment by the U.S. intelligence community that the design of a warhead for a nuclear weapon was halted in 2003, Iran continues on the two other legs of nuclear weapon development: ballistic missiles and enriching uranium. Notwithstanding the widespread misunderstanding of the National Intelligence Estimate as "proof" that Iran has abandoned its nuclear weapons program, the Director of the CIA told Meet the Press last month that he personally believes that Iran is developing nuclear weapons.

Iran is also the principal backer of the Hezbollah and Hamas terrorist organizations in, respectively, Lebanon and the Gaza Strip. Iran is also involved in the fighting in Iraq.

We support continued diplomatic engagement with Iran through the International Atomic Energy Agency as well as the E3: the United Kingdom, France and Germany. To date, these talks have been intensive and wide ranging and have included generous offerings of "carrots" in the form of economic inducements for Iran to end its nuclear weapons program.

Everything possible must be done to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. We welcome the consensus among all the presidential candidates that Iran must be deterred from acquiring nuclear weapons. Senator McCain has long insisted that "there's only one thing worse than military action against Iran and that is a nuclear-armed Iran."

Senators Clinton and Obama have said they would see an Iranian attack on Israel as an attack on the United States and retaliate accordingly.

Senator Obama said that "I will take no options off the table when it comes to preventing [Iran] from using nuclear weapons or obtaining nuclear weapons."

Senator Clinton said, "I would make it clear to the Iranians that an attack on Israel would incur massive retaliation from the United States."

Any type of military action should be held in reserve until and unless in the judgment of the Executive Branch and with legislative action by Congress, all other

avenues have been exhausted. War with Iran would not be without cost in blood and treasure. Over-all there are no good choices. We believe that the best of the bad choices is to prevent an outcome in which Iran has nuclear weapons.

DURBAN II

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At an April 8th meeting at the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, U.S. Permanent Representative to the U.N., Dr. Zalmay Khalilzad, read a statement later released by his office which is the clearest statement to date of U.S. policy with respect to the Durban II conference against racism. The main point of the statement was that the Bush Administration has now said that it will not participate in Durban II “unless it is proven that the conference will not be used as a platform for anti-Semitic behavior.”

This puts the burden of proof on proponents of convening a Durban II conference.

Israel and the United States have now issued similarly worded statements, leaving a theoretical opening for participation while basically slamming the door shut. Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni had previously said “Israel will not participate and not give legitimacy to the U.N. Follow Up Conference on Racism (Durban II), unless it is proven that the conference will not be used as a platform for further anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic activity.”

There is a slight difference between the U.S. and Israeli positions. America *will* participate if it can be proved that Durban II won't be a platform for anti-Semitism; Israel *won't* attend *unless* it can be proved that Durban II won't be a platform for anti-Semitism.

Taking note of all this, and with respect to those arguing for an immediate call to states to boycott Durban II, American Jewish Congress supports the view of those who insist that there is still work to do from the “inside” so to speak, and that a boycott call can be issued at any future point at which Durban II preparations expose the conference as a stage for anti-Semitism and anti Zionism, hatred of America and hatred of Israel. We applaud the various decisions by Canada, Israel and America to express their unreserved opposition to, and refusal to participate in, any conference that sounds or reads like Durban I.

Meeting in Washington, DC at the beginning of May, 2008 at an annual meeting of delegates from across the country, we charge the Executive Committee with the duty to remain involved in the Durban II process while reserving the right to issue a boycott call to entities including, but not limited to, the United States Government at the moment it deems most appropriate.