Forty prominent Israelis express their ‘immense gratitude’ to deputies who signed FT letter

EXCLUSIVE: Ex-IDF commanders, MKs, former ambassadors and academic say the 36 Board members facing disciplinary action have shown 'support in the battle we are fighting for the future and soul of Israel'

By LEE HARPIN
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Gideon Moshe Sa'ar, Israel's Foreign Minister, left with Phil Rosenberg, President, Board of Deputies of British Jews, right.

Forty prominent Israeli former military commanders, ex -ambassadors, one-time Knesset members and academics have signed a letter expressing “immense gratitude” to the 36 Board of Deputies facing disciplinary action over a letter published by the FT.

The signatories, who include Col. (reserve) Shaul Arieli, former commander of the IDF’s northern bridge in Gaza and a member of ex PM Ehud Barak’s negotiation team, Ambassador Colette Aviatal, a former MK and ambassador to Portugal, Prof Daniel Bar-Tel, Professor Emeritus at Tel Aviv University, and former Israeli ambassador to South Africa, Namibia , Botswana and Zimbabwe Han Baruch, praise the 36 deputies for their “support in the battle we are fighting for the future and soul of Israel. ”

“We are indebted to the brave members of the Board of Deputies of British Jews who have raised their voices in condemnation of the actions of the Israeli Government and in support of a better future for the people of Israel, particularly in the context of the significant rise in antisemitism experienced by Jews outside of Israel since October 7th,” states the letter.

“We are aware that you pay a personal price for speaking out. You are to be commended for taking a righteous stance alongside the hundreds of thousands of Israelis who are demanding that the government prioritize the return of the hostages and end what has become a politically-motivated war.”

Other signatories include former Speaker of the Knesset Avraham Burg, ex-deputy Speaker Prof Naomi Chzan, former Israeli Civil Service head and professor Itzhak Galnoor, New Israel Fund president Rachel Liel, and ex Attorney General Michael Ben-Yair.



We, concerned citizens of Israel who firmly oppose the regressive foreign and domestic policies of the current Israeli Government, wish to express immense gratitude to the 36 members of the British Board of Deputies for their support in the battle we are fighting for the future and soul of Israel.

The struggle being waged by the people of Israel against the attack on the democratic institutions of the state began with the Netanyahu government's "reform agenda" which, long before October 7th, set out to consolidate power in the hands of the governing leadership. We have watched as a far-right, self-serving government, led by a prime minister intent on holding onto power in order to avoid incarceration for breach of trust and fraud, has been defying the rule of law and promoting autocracy based on Jewish supremacy.

A year and a half after the horrific Hamas attack on Israel's southern communities, the Netanyahu government has proven that it is more committed to clinging to power and expanding the borders of Israel than it is to bringing our hostages home and upholding the security of Israel. The government has chosen a path of perpetual warfare until it succeeds in destroying any possibility of a sovereign Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel.

The toll taken in the lives of Israeli soldiers, the unbearable suffering of the hostages and their families, and the destruction of Gaza and annihilation of tens of thousands of its residents have failed to deter the Netanyahu government from pursuing a policy based on "might makes right," although developments over the past 18 months have proven again and again that only diplomacy can secure the release of the hostages and bring an end to the war. All the polling shows that 70% of the Israeli public are on our side in this fight.

We are indebted to the brave members of the Board of Deputies of British Jews who have raised their voices in condemnation of the actions of the Israeli Government and in support of a better future for the people of Israel, particularly in the context of the significant rise in antisemitism experienced by Jews outside of Israel since October 7th. We are aware that you pay a personal price for speaking out. You are to be commended for taking a righteous stance alongside the hundreds of thousands of Israelis who are demanding that the government prioritize the return of the hostages and end what has become a politically-motivated war.

Phil Rosenberg, president of the Board of Deputies, responded to the deputies' letter with a call for unity. Indeed, we would welcome a united stance against a government that has abandoned Jewish and universal values in pursuit of a messianic vision. Instead, many have chosen to either remain silent or pay lip service to the cause of Israel's democratic values and the plight of the hostages but refuse to object and speak out against the actions of the Israeli Government that endanger both. Their silence implies support for the nightmare our government is imposing upon us. Rosenberg was correct in pointing out that only some 10% of the deputies signed the letter, but that should be a source of shame rather than pride.

We thank our UK brothers and sisters for their courage, partnership, and commitment to the future of Israel as a democratic state.

Text of letter (full version at foot of article)

The letter also notes Board president Phil Rosenberg's call for "unity" amongst the community in response to publication of the letter by the FT last Wednesday.

"Indeed, we would welcome a united stance against a government that has abandoned Jewish and universal values in pursuit of a messianic vision," suggest the signatories behind the letter emerging from Israel.

"Instead, many have chosen to either remain silent or pay lip service to the cause of Israel's democratic values and the plight of the hostages but refuse to object and speak out against the actions of the Israeli Government that endanger both. Their silence implies support for the nightmare our government is imposing upon us."

The Israeli signatories add:" Rosenberg was correct in pointing out that only some 10% of the deputies signed the letter, but that should be a source of shame rather than pride. "

Introducing themselves, the 40 Israelis say they are "concerned citizens of Israel who firmly oppose the regressive foreign and domestic policies of the current Israeli Government."

They add that they "wish to express immense gratitude to the 36 members of the British Board of Deputies for their support in the battle we are fighting for the future and soul of Israel. "

"The struggle being waged by the people of Israel against the attack on the democratic institutions of the state began with the Netanyahu government's "reform agenda" which, long before October 7th, set out to consolidate power in the hands of the governing leadership," the letter continues.

"We have watched as a far-right, self-serving government, led by a prime minister intent on holding onto power in order to avoid incarceration for breach of trust and fraud, has been defying the rule of law and promoting autocracy based on Jewish supremacy.

"A year and a half after the horrific Hamas attack on Israel's southern communities, the Netanyahu government has proven that it is more committed to clinging to power and expanding the borders of Israel than it is to bringing our hostages home and upholding the security of Israel.

"The government has chosen a path of perpetual warfare until it succeeds in destroying any possibility of a sovereign Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel."



36 Board memners write letter to FT opposing war in Gaza

Directly criticising Benjamin Netanyahu's government the letter offers a dire assessment of 18 months of war against Hamas in Gaza.

"The toll taken in the lives of Israeli soldiers, the unbearable suffering of the hostages and their families, and the destruction of Gaza and annihilation of tens of thousands of its residents have failed to deter the Netanyahu government from pursuing a policy based on 'might makes right,' although developments over the past 18 months have proven again and again that only diplomacy can secure the release of the hostages and bring an end to the war," it says.

The Board announced on Tuesday it had suspended its vice-chair of the international division Harriet Goldeberg, while the under 35 vice chair had agreed to stand down from the executive as an investigation took place into the letter, and all 36 of those signing it.

In the letter criticising the resumption of the Gaza war, dissenting members had written: "The inclination to avert our eyes is strong, as what is happening is unbearable, but our Jewish values compel us to stand up and to speak out.

"Silence is seen as support for policies and actions that run contrary to our Jewish values'

"Israel's soul is being ripped out and we, members of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, fear for the future of the Israel we love and have such close ties to," it added.

The Board said the letter was "not representative" of its policy on Israel.

A special meeting of its executive committee was convened on Tuesday to "discuss the ramifications and consequences of this act".

After the executive committee meeting this week, Phil Rosenberg, the board's president, said: "We take alleged breaches of the code of conduct very seriously ... The Board of Deputies is clear: only our democratically elected honorary officers and authorised staff speak on behalf of the organisation."

Full text of the letter and its signatories:

We, concerned citizens of Israel who firmly oppose the regressive foreign and domestic policies of the current Israeli Government, wish to express immense gratitude to the 36 members of the British Board of Deputies for their support in the battle we are fighting for the future and soul of Israel.

The struggle being waged by the people of Israel against the attack on the democratic institutions of the state began with the Netanyahu government's "reform agenda" which, long before October 7th, set out to consolidate power in the hands of the governing leadership. We have watched as a far-right, self-serving government, led by a prime minister intent on holding onto power in order to avoid incarceration for breach of trust and fraud, has been defying the rule of law and promoting autocracy based on Jewish supremacy.

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Phil Rosenberg, president of the Board of Deputies, responded to the deputies' letter with a call for unity. Indeed, we would welcome a united stance against a government that has abandoned Jewish and universal values in pursuit of a messianic vision. Instead, many have chosen to either remain silent or pay lip service to the cause of Israel's democratic values and the plight of the hostages but refuse to object and speak out against the actions of the Israeli Government that endanger both. Their silence implies support for the nightmare our government is imposing upon us. Rosenberg was correct in pointing out that only some 10% of the deputies signed the letter, but that should be a source of shame rather than pride.

We thank our UK brothers and sisters for their courage, partnership, and commitment to the future of Israel as a democratic state.

Col. (reserve) Shaul Arieli – Former Commander of the IDF Northern Brigade in Gaza, Former Head of Prime Minister Ehud Barak's Negotiation Team.

Ambassador (ret.) Colette Avital – Former Member of Knesset; Former Ambassador to Portugal; former Consul General in New York;

Prof. Élie Barnavi – Historian; Former Israeli Ambassador to France

Prof. Daniel Bar-Tal – Political Psychologist; Professor Emeritus, Tel Aviv University

Ambassador (ret.) Ilan Baruch – Former Israeli Ambassador to South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, and Zimbabwe

Gershon Baskin – Conflict Resolution Specialist; Founder and former Co-Director, Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information

Susie Becher – Political Analyst; Managing Editor, Palestine-Israel Journal

Roman Bronfman – Political Scientist; Former Member of Knesset

Avraham (Avrum) Burg – Former Speaker of the Knesset; Former Chair, Jewish Agency for Israel

Prof. Naomi Chazan – Former Deputy Speaker of the Knesset;

Miki Dotan – Businessman & Entrepreneur

Akiva Eldar – Journalist; Former Chief Columnist, Haaretz

Prof. Eva Illouz – Former President of Bezalel Academy of Art and Design;

Prof. Moti Haiblum – Wolf Prize in Physics Recipient (2025)

Prof. Itzhak Galnoor – Former Head of the Israeli Civil Service Commission; Professor Emeritus, Hebrew University

Zehava Galon – Former Member of Knesset; Former Chair of Meretz Party

Prof. Amiram Goldblum – Medicinal Chemist; Professor, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Prof. David Harel – President, Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities; Israel Prize recipient (2004), EMET Prize recipient (2010)

Prof. Dan Jacobson – Philosopher; Professor Emeritus, Tel Aviv University

Prof. Menachem Klein – Political Scientist; Professor, Bar-Ilan University

Miki Kratsman – EMET Prize Laureate (2011)

Atty. Gaby Lasky – Former Member of Knesset

Alex Levac – Israel Prize recipient (2005)

Ambassador (ret.) Alon Liel – Former Director General, Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Former Ambassador to South Africa

Rachel Liel – President of the New Israel Fund

Anat Maor – Former Member of Knesset

Prof. Jacob Metzer – Former President of the Open University, Professor Emeritus, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Atty. Michael Ben-Yair – Former Attorney General of Israel; Former Acting Supreme Court Justice

Mickey Rosenthal – Former Member of Knesset

Maya Savir – Writer

Atty. Talia Sasson – Former Head of the Special Tasks Division at the State Attorney's office; served as a Special Legal Advisor to the government under former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon

Hillel Schenker – Editor and Journalist; Co-editor, Palestine-Israel Journal

Prof. David Dean Shulman – Israel Prize recipient (2016), EMET Prize recipient (2010)

Prof. Dmitry Shumsky – Historian; Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Nadav Tamir – Diplomat; Former Israeli Consul General to New England

Dr. Pnina Peri –The Academic College Levinsky-Wingate; Sapir College; University of Maryland

Prof. Yoram Peri – Former Advisor to late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin; and former Editor-in-chief of the Israeli daily, Davar; Professor (emeritus), University of Maryland

Mossi Raz – Former Member of Knesset

Prof. Joseph Zeira – Economist, Hebrew University of Jerusalem; served on the Governmental Committee on Poverty in Israel (2014).

Dedi Zucker – Civil Rights Advocate; Former Member of Knesset

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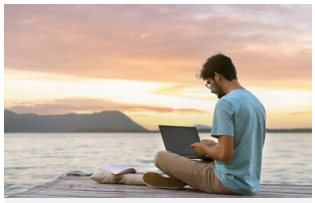

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