

NEWS

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- ◀ This is the American Jewish Committee:
- ◀ Founded in 1906.
- ◀ Pioneer American organization combating bigotry, protecting the civil and religious rights of Jews here and abroad, and advancing the cause of human rights everywhere.
- ◀ Chapters in 44 principal cities; members in more than 550 American communities.

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FOR RELEASE ON RECEIPT

New York...Herbert B. Ehrmann, President of the American Jewish Committee, today charged Israel's Prime Minister David Ben Gurion with "grievous error" and violation of an understanding arrived at ten years ago with the AJC as to the relationship of American Jews and Jews residing elsewhere throughout the world and the State of Israel.

The following is the full text of the Committee's statement on Mr. Ben Gurion's reported remarks made at the World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem:

"The American Jewish Committee and Jews throughout the United States and the world are both grieved and shocked by the reported statement of David Ben Gurion, Prime Minister of Israel, that Jews wherever they are have the obligation to emigrate to Israel.

"As Americans devoted to democratic principles, we have a deep interest in the development of a democratic society in Israel, while, as Jews, we have a natural sympathy with our fellow-Jews with whom we are bound by traditional historic and religious ties.

"Mr. Ben Gurion's statement is a violation of the explicit understanding arrived at ten years ago with Jacob Blaustein, then President of the American Jewish Committee, that 'the government and people of Israel fully respect the right and integrity of the Jewish communities in other countries to develop their own mode of life and their indigenous social, economic and cultural institutions in accordance with their own needs and aspirations,' and, 'that nothing should be said or done which could in the slightest degree undermine the sense of security and stability of American Jewry.'

The American Jewish Committee
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"The statement made yesterday violates the basic spirit of understanding inherent in these assertions -- a spirit we consider

fundamental to the continuing friendly and cooperative relationship between Jews in the United States and countries elsewhere and the State of Israel.

"The American Jewish Committee has always maintained that emigration to Israel must be an act of free choice, within the personal discretion of each individual, and certainly cannot be considered a necessary and vital aspect of his religious faith. In the words of Mr. Ben Gurion himself, as stated in 1950, 'the decision of whether they (Jews) wish to come (to Israel) -- permanently or temporarily -- rests with the free discretion of the American Jew himself.'

"We fully recognize Mr. Ben Gurion's great services as a courageous leader of Israel, and his contributions to the development of the State of Israel. The American Jews have provided strong moral and financial support to this great undertaking. Mr. Ben-Gurion commits a grievous error when he undertakes to impose obligations on Jews throughout the world with respect to their religious beliefs or practices, regardless of whether these are orthodox, conservative or reform, and thus renders a great disservice both to Judaism and the State of Israel itself. Whatever authority Mr. Ben Gurion may have to speak for Jewish citizens in Israel, he has none whatsoever to speak for Jews in other parts of the world.

"We confidently assert that, contrary to Mr. Ben Gurion's reported statement that Judaism will suffer 'a kiss of death' outside of Israel, Judaism is in fact a flourishing religion which, in democratic countries such as the United States, enjoys equal rights and opportunities with all other religions.

"We therefore regretfully conclude that the reported statement has the effect of doing what the Prime Minister appeared to have wished to avoid when he stated in 1950: 'Nothing should be said or done which could in the slightest degree undermine the sense of security and stability of American Jewry' and of Jews throughout the world."

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