

# Statement of Agudath Israel on Chareidi Principles

October 28, 2020

Recent organizational statements from representatives of the Zionist movement have implied that Chareidi Jews have accepted the Jerusalem Program of the World Zionist Organization. This Program, which is a statement of the Zionist ideology, declares Zionism to be “the national liberation movement of the Jewish people” and avers to “the centrality of the State of Israel . . . in the life of the nation.”

The Jewish people is a nation based on the belief in One Hashem and the Torah He gave us, and nothing else. By omitting this truth, the Jerusalem Program - and the Zionist ideology it embodies - attempt to redefine the essence of the Jewish people as a political entity similar to all other nations of the world. This redefinition goes against the essence of our emunah and mesorah.

Among the foundational principles upon which the Torah giants of the past century established the Agudas Yisroel movement was the firm rejection of the Zionist redefinition of Jewish peoplehood. Throughout its history Agudas Yisroel has remained faithful to that essential principle, and it will continue to do so. We therefore reiterate: Any suggestion that the ideology of Zionism is compatible with Chareidi Jewry’s fundamental beliefs has no basis and must be rejected.

Also without basis is the notion that a party identifying itself as representing Chareidi Jews has the authority to sign a coalition agreement within the World Zionist Congress together with other Jewish parties including non-Orthodox religious groups, as happened last week. Chareidi Jewry has long abided by the halachic ruling of the most revered Torah leaders of a generation ago that it is forbidden to join Jewish organizations whose purpose is to bring Orthodox Jewry together with non-Orthodox under one organizational umbrella. What happened last week at the World Zionist Congress transgresses the spirit of that ruling, and represents a departure

from accepted Chareidi norms. Whatever financial benefits may accrue to worthy institutions as a result of this coalition agreement, they do not justify the abandonment of principle.

At a time when there is so much confusion in our Jewish world, it is essential that we Chareidim remind ourselves that we stand for principle - and that we cannot stand silently by when fundamental values are distorted.

## ***Postscript: What The Statement Means... And Doesn't***

*Agudath Israel of America's "Statement of Agudah Israel on Charedi Principles" is precisely and only what that title clearly states: a reiteration of our movement's longstanding theological stance, in this case on Zionism.*

*From the very beginning of the Zionist movement, before the state of Israel's establishment, there were deep concerns among European Gedolim about the Jewish movement that regarded the establishment of a "Jewish State" in part of Eretz Yisroel to be the highest ideal of the Jewish people.*

*Once the state of Israel was founded, the Gedolim who guided the Agudas Yisroel movement felt that, while involvement in the democratic workings of the new state - including in the Knesset - was in fact a necessary protection of religious Jews' rights, kedushas Eretz Yisroel and kedushas Am Yisroel, the notion that the ideology of Zionism defines Jewish peoplehood is false.*

*Thus, as Rav Reuven Grozovsky zt"l, the chairman of Agudath Israel's Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah at the time of the establishment of Medinas Yisrael, wrote, in his classic sefer "Ba'ayos Haz'man," while the Knesset is a governmental body whose decisions affect us, the voluntary joining with any Zionist group or congress is unacceptable to Jews who know that Torah is the ultimate definer and unifier of the Jewish people.*

*The accompanying statement simply reiterates that timeless truth.*

*What our statement does not mean is that we reject in any way our fellow Jews who may not recognize that truth.*

*Nor does it mean that we will in any way change our support for Israel's needs. Agudath Israel of America has always advocated in the halls of government for Israel's security and economic needs and general welfare, and will always do so.*

*And, most importantly, our statement is not intended to - and does not - in any way injure Jewish unity. On the contrary, it fosters it, in its reminding to all Jews that, as Rav Saadia Gaon famously declared: "The Jewish nation is a nation only by virtue of the Torah."*