



# Why Support Israel?



## FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND EQUALITY

Israel is a unique country in the otherwise bleak and chaotic Middle East.

- It's a democracy with freedom and the rule of law when surrounding states are human rights abusing autocracies or have collapsed into lawlessness and civil strife.
- Israel defines itself as a Jewish and democratic state, but in many respects, Israeli culture is secular, with freedom of religion and official recognition for the Christian, Muslim, Druze and Baha'i communities.
- Israel is a state with full civil rights for all its citizens. The principle is enshrined in Israel's Declaration of Independence and is protected by Israel's Supreme Court.
- Arabs and other minorities play a full and active role in the state, having served as ministers in the government, justices of the Supreme Court, members of parliament, senior academics, ambassadors, members of the civil service, and in the military.
- Both Hebrew and Arabic are official languages of Israel.
- Israel has a vigorous and diverse free press.
- Israel has an independent judiciary that regularly holds the government to account.
- Israel is the only country in the Middle East which advances the rights of women and the LGBT community.
- Israel was the first Western country to have a female Prime Minister - Golda Meir.
- Israel is the only country in the whole of Asia which has recognised unregistered cohabitation between same sex couples and recognises same sex marriage.
- Freedom House ranks Israel as 1 on a scale of 1 to 7 (with 1 being the highest) for political rights, 1.5 for freedom and 2 for civil liberties. These are by far the best rankings in the entire Middle East and North Africa region, better than five current EU member states including Greece, and better than emerging democratic powers such as Brazil, India and South Africa.

Israel is a beacon of freedom. Freedom for the Jewish people to enjoy self-determination in their own national homeland after two millennia of exile and persecution. And freedom for every Israeli citizen, whether Jewish or Arab, to choose their own elected representatives in free and fair elections; to express themselves politically, religiously and culturally; and to live a good life the way they want to, free from intolerance, persecution and oppression.

## ISRAEL HAS GIVEN UP LAND FOR PEACE

Every Israeli Government since 2000 has been committed to a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Israel has repeatedly engaged in efforts to make peace with its neighbours based on the principles of land for peace.

- Israel agreed to return the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in return for peace and recognition in 1979.
- Israel recognised the PLO and withdrew from Palestinian population centres in Gaza and the West Bank as part of the Oslo Accords with the PLO signed in 1993.
- In 2005, Israel withdrew unilaterally from the Gaza Strip and part of the northern West Bank.
- In 2008, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert offered to create a Palestinian state on the equivalent of 99% of the West Bank (after land swaps) and to share control over Jerusalem's Holy Places.





# What is Zionism and how was Israel created?

## THE ORIGINS OF ZIONISM

**Zionism is the belief that the Jewish people should have a homeland in Israel.**

Following defeat by the Roman Empire, most Jews lived in exile outside the land of Israel for 2,000 years (although there was a residual continuous Jewish presence), in many countries as a persecuted minority.

Inspired by other national movements in Europe, Zionism emerged in the 19th century as a national freedom movement among Jews. The founder of modern political Zionism was Theodore Herzl.

Zionists believed that the oppression and discrimination faced by Jews in Europe and elsewhere arose from their lack of a homeland. A homeland would give Jews physical security, and allow a full flowering of their culture.

Although predominantly a secular movement, Zionism was rooted in the Jewish people's strong emotional and religious attachment to its historic homeland in Israel, then part of the Ottoman Empire.

Herzl's Zionist Organisation encouraged migration to Palestine. This immigration and purchase of land for agriculture (often from Arab absentee landlords) was legally approved by the Ottoman authorities.

## THE BALFOUR DECLARATION AND LEAGUE OF NATIONS

During the First World War Britain conquered Palestine from the Ottoman Empire. In the 1917 Balfour Declaration, the British Government announced its support for a Jewish national home in Palestine.

In 1922 Britain received the Mandate to govern Palestine on behalf of the League of Nations. The wording of the Balfour Declaration was included in the Mandate. 'Palestine' as defined in the Mandate included the present-day state of Jordan as well as Israel and the West Bank and Gaza.

## JEWISH IMMIGRATION AND NAZI GERMANY

The events of the Holocaust in Europe accelerated the demand for a Jewish state.

Jews sought desperately to escape the Nazis. Most other states closed their borders to refugees, which swelled the flow of immigrants to Palestine.

The British barred Jewish immigration to Palestine in 1939.

After the war, many Holocaust survivors, unable or unwilling to return to their homes, clamoured for admission to Palestine. The British authorities refused entry to the majority of them. What the British termed as "illegal immigration" flourished and was met with a tough response. The Zionists fought to end British mandate rule and achieve a Jewish state.

## ISRAEL AS AN INDEPENDENT STATE

In 1947, the United Nations approved a plan to partition the land between a Jewish and an Arab State. The Jews accepted the plan but the Arab community in Palestine and the Arab States rejected it. Arab militias attacked Jewish communities. When the British Mandate ended the Zionists established Israel as an independent State. Armed forces from all the neighbouring Arab countries invaded. Despite the odds, the tiny Jewish state survived and won the War of Independence.

The borders of Israel between 1948 and 1967, known as the '67 borders, were actually the ceasefire line at the end of the War of Independence.

In 1967, Israel's Arab neighbours declared their intention to invade again and attempt to destroy the Jewish state. Israel launched a pre-emptive strike against Egypt and Syria and counter-attacked against the attacking Jordanian forces. Victory in the Six Day War saw it gain control over Sinai, Gaza, the West Bank and the Golan Heights.