



B ' N A I B ' R I T H I N T E R N A T I O N A L

Office of United Nations Affairs



A Singular Record of Activism and Accomplishment



In 1945, B'nai B'rith International President Henry Mon-sky led an expansive Jewish coalition at the historic San Francisco conference that created the United Nations. As an official public advisor to the conference's U.S. delegation, he crafted a strategy to ensure the rights of the Jewish people in their homeland. In the Holocaust's immediate aftermath, he also advocated for making membership in the nascent world body contingent upon a country's fulfillment of minimum human rights standards.



*The 1945 United Nations
Conference on International
Organization, in San Francisco*

The emergence of the United Nations was a development that, from the beginning, clearly carried risks and flaws, but it truly was a monumental achievement. Particularly after two World Wars which killed untold tens of millions of people, the resolve to chart a new course was greater than ever. And so, the creation of not just a parliament of nations but an organization of "nations united"—the United Nations—brought with it once-unimaginable hope.



B'nai B'rith officials, including Philip Lax, Jack J. Spitzer and Fred Simon Worms meeting with U.N. Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar (center)

The founding Charter of the United Nations certainly aimed high: “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war,” “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small,” and “to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security.” The subsequently adopted Universal Declaration of Human Rights became the first global expression of essential entitlements for every human being. Eleanor Roosevelt, the driving force behind the declaration, envisioned it as an “international Magna Carta” for all people, everywhere.

In 1948, Israel was established, following U.N. adoption the year prior of the Partition Plan to create neighboring Jewish and Arab states in the former British Mandate for Palestine. The plan was accepted by the Jewish community, but rejected by the Arab world. Nearly two millennia after exile from the land, Jews saw fulfillment of Theodor Herzl’s stunning prediction, a half-century earlier, that the Jewish state would be a reality within 50 years.



Israel’s Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett and first U.N. representative, Abba Eban, unfurling the national flag at the world body in 1949

Israel was thus founded with an uncommon relationship to the United Nations, its existence having been uniquely endorsed by the world body. Israel was admitted to the body in 1949 and cooperation within the United Nations was a cornerstone of Israel’s early foreign policy, and an aspiration, at least, in the decades since. Israel’s Declaration of Independence positively references the United Nations not once but seven times.

Years later, however, David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s founding prime minister, came to famously confirm a negative change in the attitude of Israelis toward the United Nations. But the Israelis hadn’t chosen to distance themselves from the United Nations. It was the United Nations that changed.

With the Cold War prompting fiercely competitive blocs at the United Nations, and the long-awaited process of decolonization multiplying the number of non-democratic member states, the Arab and aligned nations (particularly the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which alone encompasses nearly 60 of over 190 current U.N. countries) began exploiting the world body for the systemic censure and isolation of Israel. Until this day, more than 65 years after the founding of the United Nations, Israel



William Korey (left), founder of the Office of U.N. Affairs, at President Reagan’s ratifying of the Genocide Convention

alone is excluded from full membership in a U.N. regional group (and thus from many key positions and deliberations); she is condemned annually in dozens of biased resolutions and reports by countless agencies and assemblies, demonized and delegitimized by units in the U.N. bureaucracy assigned to this purpose, and threatened with international sanctions and prosecution for attempting to protect the lives of its citizens.

Without fail, however, B’nai B’rith has been there to respond.

Beginning in 1947, B’nai B’rith has been officially accredited to multiple U.N. bodies: the Economic and Social Council, the Department of Public Information (DPI), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. At the United Nations, BBI continues to operate the Coordinating Board of Jewish Organizations as a communal voice. And since 1960, B’nai B’rith has been the only major Jewish organization with a full-time Office of United Nations Affairs—supported by a lay-led Council on U.N. Affairs—and an active, professional presence



Senior Protestant, Catholic and Greek Orthodox leaders with President Allan J. Jacobs and Executive Vice President Daniel S. Mariaschin at B’nai B’rith’s Holocaust Remembrance Day event



Director of U.N. Affairs David Michaels with German Chancellor Angela Merkel

at U.N. institutions in New York, Paris, Vienna, Santiago and Geneva. The organization has also assumed key roles on such important U.N. committees as the DPI/ Non-Governmental Organizations Section Executive Committee, the NGO Committee on

Human Rights, the Committee of Religious NGOs, the NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief, the NGO Committee on Youth, the informal Caucus of Jewish NGOs and the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations.

Over the recent period, B'nai B'rith has summoned attention when the General Assembly president said that Palestinians suffer conditions worse than the victims of Nazism, when a Syrian representative claimed that Israeli children sing of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of enemies, when a Palestinian Authority official accused Israel of apartheid policies, and as U.N. bodies proliferate prejudiced investigations following episodes such as radical Turkish activists' efforts to penetrate an Israeli blockade on weaponry destined for terrorists.

B'nai B'rith led a successful 16-year campaign to rescind



Honorary President Moishe Smith with Human Rights Council President Martin Ihoeghian Uhomoibhi of Nigeria



Past U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. John Bolton, State Department envoy on anti-Semitism Hannah Rosenthal and Canadian leader Irwin Cotler at a B'nai B'rith symposium on the Durban racism framework

the notorious 1975 General Assembly resolution equating Zionism with racism. Three years earlier, when Kurt Waldheim was U.N. chief in 1972, BBI directly demanded that the organization take action following the Palestinian massacre of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics. BBI has helped encourage a still-ongoing process of Israeli inclusion in the Western European and Others Group (WEOG), a U.N. association of various key democracies, and also pressed actively for Israel's admission to other international organizations, such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, which finally admitted the Magen David Adom society in 2006.

B'nai B'rith mobilized the largest Jewish presence at the 2001 World Conference against Racism in South Africa. BBI again brought the single largest Jewish delegation to the Durban Review Conference in 2009, preventing expansion upon the shocking anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic rhetoric of eight years earlier. B'nai B'rith sent proof of Hamas' gross violations of international law in its launching of terror attacks upon, and from among, civilians, to the now largely discredited Goldstone Fact-Finding Mission on Gaza. BBI also forced the so-called "investigators" to listen to a young Israeli victim of the Palestinian rockets. B'nai B'rith is vigilant in confronting any unfair, unequal or hostile treatment of

the world's lone Jewish democracy. It does so by routinely delivering formal interventions at the Human Rights Council and deploring its ritualistic abuse of Israel at the expense of foremost humanitarian crises worldwide. BBI has also demanded a response on incitement in education from the commissioner-general of the U.N. Relief and Works Agency, which focuses on Palestinian refugees.

Every year, B'nai B'rith meets with U.N. officials, confers with countless diplomats accredited to the world body, and orchestrates the organized Jewish community's marathon consultations with world leaders in September. Thanks to the persistent action of B'nai B'rith and its allies, the United Nations began international observance of Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2005—marked annually by a major BBI event at



B'nai B'rith was in the forefront of opposition to the "Zionism-is-racism" resolution



B'nai B'rith delegates at the Palais des Nations during the Durban Review Conference



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at the United Nations

U.N. Headquarters—and a growing number of states are now walking out on appearances by Iran’s president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, as he denies past genocide against Jews while threatening a new one

against the Jewish state.

For over 50 years, B’nai B’rith’s Office of United Nations Affairs has spearheaded the promotion of the organization’s objectives and the values of the Jewish community and its diverse friends. In 1960, B’nai B’rith initiated an early campaign



A leadership group, accompanied by U.S. Ambassador David Killion and B’nai B’rith UNESCO delegate Witold Zys, meeting with UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova

at the United Nations to secure freedom of movement for repressed Jews in the Soviet Union. In 1988, concerted advocacy by B’nai B’rith’s late founding director of U.N. affairs, William Korey, led to U.S. ratification of the U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Today, B’nai B’rith highlights concerns ranging from atrocities in the Darfur region of Sudan to efforts to proscribe discussion of violent extremism as “defamation of religion” to Iran’s ongoing pursuit of illicit nuclear capabilities.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon himself has recognized as “influential” and “very powerful” the role B’nai B’rith plays at the United Nations. His predecessor, Kofi Annan, said that the organization “brings long international experience and a global presence” to its work, with a “continuing role” in promoting



B’nai B’rith leaders – including Honorary President Richard D. Heideman and Geneva U.N. representatives Klaus Netter and Armand Azoulai – with Israeli Ambassador Aharon Leshno-Yaar

Middle East peace. BBI uses its unmatched record and all its global resources to fulfill the enduring mandate in its charter, written by German Jewish immigrants to New York in 1843, for service “on the broadest principles of humanity.”



Council on U.N. Affairs Chairman and Honorary President Joel S. Kaplan at the first B’nai B’rith U.N. Holocaust remembrance event

The United Nations is, without a doubt, an imperfect institution, but it is no less a vital one. B’nai B’rith’s Office of United Nations Affairs will continue to work tirelessly to urge the United Nations to realize its founding vision and values.



Executive Vice President Daniel S. Mariaschin, Center for Human Rights and Public Policy Chairman Joseph E. Harari and other B’nai B’rith leaders with U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon



OFFICE OF UNITED NATIONS AFFAIRS
(212) 557-0019, FAX (212) 687-3429, UN@BNAIBRITH.ORG
www.bnaibrith.org