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| 19.58x21.76 | 1/2 | עמוד 32 | HAMIZRAHI | 12/02/2020 | 71973252-6 |
| בנימין זאב הרצל - בהקשר לציונות - 80790 | | | | | |

The Vote for a Forest in Maale Adumim

It has already been many years since Keren Kayemet LeIsrael (KKL) – Jewish National Fund (JNF) has planted a new forest in Maale Adumim. Since then, no new forests have been planted anywhere “over the Green Line” – in Yehudah and Shomron. Today, KKL-JNF is the only organization in Israel that is responsible for afforestation, as stipulated in the covenant signed between KKL-JNF and the state of Israel. Forests in Yehudah and Shomron are being maintained, but new ones are not being planted.

This is not for financial reasons. KKL-JNF has an annual budget of around 1 billion NIS. Some of their budget comes from donations from Jews across the world, while the majority comes from land sales of Israeli land. KKL-JNF owns 14% of Israeli land, 80% of which are located north of Be’er Sheva. These are valuable pieces of property. This means that most Israelis who are purchasing new apartments today are buying land from KKL-JNF at the end of the day.

KKL-JNF was one of the institutions established to help facilitate the necessary processes towards establishing a Jewish state, at the first meeting of the World Zionist Congress in 1897. In addition to

KKL-JNF, over the years, the World Zionist Congress has established the Jewish Agency, Keren HaYesod and other institutions that helped with the founding of the State.

Since the time of Theodor Herzl and the first World Zionist Congress, the Congress has met once every five years to discuss the future of the Jewish nation and the Jewish state. Starting with the decision not to establish the Jewish state in Uganda and continuing with the establishment of Hebrew University and more, there is no doubt that the World Zionist Congress has made important and necessary decisions towards the establishment of the State of Israel.

Even after the establishment of the State of Israel, the National Institutes (KKL-JNF, World Zionist Organization, Keren HaYesod and the Jewish Agency) have continued to work in their various fields. First and foremost as a place for the Jewish communities of the Diaspora to meet, discuss and reach agreements, but also as a representative of the Jewish World to the Israeli government.

The various institutes operate with a certain synergy but are completely independent. Each has its own policies, plans, annual budget

and goals. The upcoming vote for the World Zionist Congress will determine, among other things, who sits on the board of directors of those organizations and a large number of key positions ranging from the heads of the institutes to the various directors. These directors will then decide on key policies such as programming and cooperation with Israel and pro-Israel organizations combating BDS and antisemitism; Direct influence over the national institutions budget, pushing more support and subsidies to gap year programs; Support building and developing the Golan Heights, Jerusalem, Yehudah, Shomron and the Jordan Valley; Enriching our shuls, schools, yeshivot, campuses, camps and youth movements with *shlichim*, campus leaders, educational programs and joint US-Israel programs.

Despite the undeniable importance of this vote and even with the support of various senior rabbis, it seems that the public itself is not interested in voting for the World Zionist Congress. Thus five years ago, only 9,000 people voted for the religious “Torah” party OIC, made up of Yeshiva University, Orthodox Union, Touro College, Bnei Akiva, World Mizrahi and more.



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| 19.43x22.06 | 2/2 | עמוד 33 | HAMIZRAHI | 12/02/2020 | 71973253-7 |
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There are various possible reasons for the low voting rate despite an intense campaign involving ads across a broad spectrum of media outlets and speakers in local shuls. **It remains a mystery as to how to change the result and motivate people to vote.** Even though you don't even need to leave home to vote! Voting is done online by declaring that you are Jewish and paying between \$5 to \$7.5 to fund the costs of the Congress voting system.

"The vote mainly affects people living in Israel and not those abroad," Meyer Sterman, publisher of *HaMizrachi*, says. "People vote for what affects them. If it does not affect them, they simply don't vote. Even though this vote does not directly pertain to the Jews abroad, it has a daily impact on those living in Israel. How many prayer sections there are at the Kotel will certainly interest the Jew overseas, but it does not affect him as much as it affects the Jews here. In Israel, it is a living reality. It will keep the media busy for weeks, cause rifts in Israeli society and question the religious identity of the State of Israel. The Jew in Texas will feel it less. Therefore, the US Jew is hardly interested in the vote."

Dov Katz (38), a resident of Ma'aleh Adumim and a strategic consultant, is working to change the reality. "Planting a new forest in Ma'aleh Adumim is just one small example in the KKL-JNF policy I would like to see changed. Today, the KKL-JNF does not make active investments beyond the Green Line. There is no reason for them not to contribute to the building of a new kindergarten

in Ma'aleh Adumim, as it does elsewhere. KKL-JNF does not lack the funds, in fact, the National Institutes have a combined annual budget of over \$800 million. It is all a matter of policy determined by voting for the World Zionist Congress."

As Rabbi Hershel Schachter recently stated: "Every few years, when they have the World Zionist Congress, decisions are made where they should place their money, which direction we should push the *Medinah*. And it's very important. All the different groups are pushing their own direction. If we want to see to it that Eretz Yisrael should continue to be a Jewish country, with the flavor that we know it's supposed to have, we have to see to it... the Orthodox Israel Coalition – the Mizrachi Vote Torah slate will see to it that the money will be allocated to those projects and programs that are most important both in Eretz Yisrael and in *Chutz La'aretz*. It is terrible that much of the money, millions of dollars are wasted. The money is put in absolutely the wrong direction, to destroying the nature of Eretz Yisrael as we know what it's supposed to be. It is incumbent upon us to see to it that everyone should join and have their voice heard. Bottom line, we encourage everyone to vote for Orthodox Israel Coalition – the Mizrachi Vote Torah slate."

Sterman and Katz are encouraging those with family and friends in the US to tell them to vote. "It is not enough to hope something changes, this is our opportunity to make our prayers come true. All we tell

people is contact your relatives and ask them to vote for you because it really affects us directly and indirectly on the character of the State of Israel and the Jewish people in different areas."

Are you asking Israelis to get involved with American politics?

"This is about Jewish values, not politics. While ideally we would like people to vote for OIC which brings together a broad spectrum of mainstream Orthodox, from AMIT to Yeshiva University and the Orthodox Union (OU)," says Sterman "our main goal is to open people's eyes to the importance of voting for the World Zionist Congress and the power the WZC has to shape the future of the Jewish nation and Jewish State. Believe it or not, most people are not even aware of the WZC vote."

"We made it as simple as possible: we are just asking people to send a WhatsApp in the family group. It takes literally five seconds. We send you the WhatsApp to send with a link for registration and an explanation on how to vote. Voting is done online and does not require people to leave home at all."

To receive materials to send to your relatives, WhatsApp or call Dov Katz on +972-52-524-8575.