



11.76x30.25	1	עמוד 11	the jerusalem post - front	11/11/2025	95883082-3
בנימין זאב הרצל - בהקשר לצינון - 80790					

: May this be the last Zionist Congress

May this be the last Zionist Congress

• By MARTIN OLINER

Six months ago, I wrote a column calling for the World Zionist Organization and Keren Kayemet Le'Israel to be dismantled, after a corrupt voting process for the World Zionist Congress.

Plenty of people complained to me that what I wrote was sacrilegious. Some took what I said as anti-Zionist, even though I am the chairman of the Religious Zionists of America, not the mayor of New York.

Now, after watching what happened at the congress, suddenly people are contacting me to tell me how right I was back then. They saw a corrupt bonanza of financial allocations for pork-barrel projects of Jewish interest groups and completely unnecessary political patronage positions.

Now what I wrote then is even more relevant: "If Theodor Herzl came back from the dead and saw the current state of the WZO and KKL, he might jump from his hotel porch in Basel and dissolve it all right away."

Herzl was the first head of the World Zionist Organization, and he made sure the congress would be about Zionist ideology, not the non-ideological farce this one became.

As I write this, it is unclear who will receive each post in the Zionist institutions. The initial deal unraveled because of opposition to the appointment of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's son, Yair, whom I got to know when we were part of a delegation that visited with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

I found the young man to be quite articulate. He could actually excel in a job in charge of public diplomacy if he was given a chance. The inward-looking group would not permit the appointment.

However, that should not be what this money is spent on. Everyone should be disgusted by the decision to create seven new departments with countless employees and to expand the WZO's executive board from 14 to 24 positions.

In the interest of full disclosure, I have headed organizations that benefit from the WZO, but that has only reinforced my belief that it needs to be shut down.

IT IS TIME for Israel to nationalize the Zionist Institutions and give them proper oversight. The massive war-chest of KKL could be used for rebuilding the South and the North, for treating the physically wounded and those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, and even for a bullet factory to build basic armaments Israel lacked in this war due to its over-reliance on the United States.

Israel should not be allocating money for the Diaspora when it has so many problems of its own that require immediate attention as a seven-front war comes to a close.

The money could still be used to bring

Diaspora Jews to Israel and build connections with Jewish youth worldwide. Plenty of organizations do that without such bureaucracy and waste.

Jewish federations can go back to their bread and butter of supporting Israel. The focus should go back to giving to Israel, not taking from Israel.

Diaspora communities should no longer influence policy in Israel, as they have tried unsuccessfully to do – for instance, with facilitating nontraditional prayer services at the Western Wall.

Decisions about Israel should be made by people who live in Israel and are part of its political system. They are elected in real elections, ones that are very different from the online chicanery facilitated by the WZO.

The Hamas-led terrorist attacks in southern Israel on October 7, 2023, proved how unprepared American Jewish organizations were for times of crisis. Their leadership mistakes are blatantly clear, but none have paid a price, and the Zionist Congress ended up empowering them even more.

I WROTE half a year ago that immediate action was required to improve transparency in Zionist institutions: "How about hiring an outside firm to review its business practices and cut costs? Is there no Elon Musk wannabe out there who could do for the WZO what he is doing for the American government?"

If opposition leader Yair Lapid agreed with me back then he should have spoken up, instead of legitimizing the corruption until it was too late. Only after he accepted the KKL chairmanship for his No. 2, Meir Cohen, did he suddenly raise objections in order to get a headline and pretend to be relevant.

Lapid said his Yesh Atid party would "not be party to any agreement in the Zionist institutions. We will not take budgets, we will not take executive positions, and we will not be part of the deal being put together there."

Still, Yesh Atid will remain part of the WZO, and the 128-year-old institution will continue to exist, long after it became redundant.

I do appreciate that Lapid said his faction would submit a bill in the Knesset to nationalize KKL, its significant land holdings, and its budget. However, the chances of it being passed by the opposition during an election year are slim to none.

I hope that the next government, no matter who heads it, will take action to ensure that the current Zionist Congress will be the last. There is no accountability in the Zionist institutions. The time has come for the KKL and WZO to go.

The writer is chairman of the Religious Zionists of America and president of the Culture for Peace Institute. He is a committee member of the Jewish Agency for Israel and serves as a member of the US Holocaust Memorial Council. The views expressed here are his own. To contact him: Martinoliner@gmail.com