

The Chicago Board of Rabbis has issued a response to the recent ruling from some community rabbis in Israel that forbids leasing property to non-Jews. In the wake of the widespread criticism and rejection of this ruling from both the political and religious realms, Israel has reaffirmed and shown its ongoing commitment to the civil rights of all of its citizens.

To our rabbinic colleagues in Israel,

We, the Chicago Board of Rabbis, whose members serve in congregations and communities across the greater Chicago area, are turning to you for your assistance and leadership in this critical moment. We are greatly dismayed at the recent pronouncement of a group of community rabbis in Israel that forbids leasing apartments to non-Jews. In this pronouncement, this group proudly states that “racism originates in the Torah.” We unequivocally reject this position as an unethical debasement of the holy principle that all humans are created *b'tzelem Elokim*, “in the image of G-d” (Gen. 1:26,27).

Furthermore, throughout our history, we the people of Israel have intimately known the effects of racist laws like this and believe that we have a sacred responsibility to act differently towards others. As it says in the Torah, “Do not pervert the rights of the stranger . . . and remember that you were once a slave in Egypt” (Deuteronomy 24:17-18). When those who represent the official rabbinic leadership of the State of Israel express such positions, we are distressed by this *Chillul HaShem*, desecration of God’s name.

While only 39 rabbis, a small minority of the rabbinic leadership in Israel, signed onto this hateful letter, its impact is large as many of the rabbis occupy powerful positions within the Rabbinic Authority of the State of Israel. It is for this reason, that we feel compelled to publicly and unequivocally reject this unethical ruling.

This degradation of the Torah threatens both Israel and our communities. Some will exploit statements like these, leading to anti-Jewish and anti-Israel sentiment. They do great damage to our efforts to encourage people to love and support Israel. They communicate to our congregants that Israel does not share their values, and they promote feelings of alienation and distancing.

We applaud Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Peres, as well as Chacham Ovadia Yosef and many other leading rabbis, and the heads of the Holocaust Memorial, Yad Vashem who denounced this rabbinic decree as a, “severe blow to the values of our lives as Jews and human beings in a democratic state” (Ha’aretz 12/9/10). We ask you, our brethren in Israel, to continue to stand up to this hateful and dangerous distortion of Torah. We stand with you and ask that for the sake of all of the people of Israel, the State of Israel, and our Torah, you take a strong and public stance against this immoral representation of the Jewish tradition.