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## Declare Yom Kippur a U.N. Holiday

By Daniel S. Mariaschin and David J. Michaels

**T**HE emblem of the United Nations shows the planet brought together in the embrace of two olive branches. Its charter affirms the “equal rights” of “nations large and small.” But in the “family of nations,” some members are more equal than others. No example of this inequity is starker than that of Israel.

The State of Israel was created, in the Jewish ancestral homeland, as a result of a United Nations resolution. Its 1948 proclamation of independence refers to the United Nations seven times. Israel tries to contribute to international peace in every area in which it can help, from disaster relief to medical innovation to agricultural technology. Jewish hope in the organization — created in the aftermath of the Holocaust — can be discerned in the words from Isaiah inscribed beside the Shalunsky Steps, which face the United Nations headquarters in New York City: “Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

But over time, Israel has been a target for exceptional mistreatment at the United Nations. A pluralistic democracy facing extremists sworn to its destruction, Israel is routinely condemned by the body’s Human Rights Council, more than any other member state. Israel’s assailants at the United Nations often assert that they respect Jews and Judaism — and reserve their shrill disdain only for Israeli policies and Zionism. But the demonization of Israel calls their motives into question.

The United Nations is headquartered in the United States, the country with the most Jews outside Israel, and in New York

City, which has the single largest Jewish population in the Diaspora. Judaism, of course, is an ancient, biblical religion — a precursor of the two dominant world faiths — and Jewish communities can be found in at least 120 member states.

In 1997, the General Assembly added two Muslim holidays (Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr) to the official calendar of the United Nations headquarters. Two of the 10 holidays are Christian (Good Friday and Christmas) and the other six are American federal holidays. None is Jewish.

Important United Nations events — even, sometimes, meetings related to Israel — have repeatedly been scheduled on major Jewish holidays, forcing Jewish diplomats and representatives of civil society to choose between their professional duties and their faith and families.

Yom Kippur, the most sacred day of the Jewish year, unites Jews of all nationalities, political orientations and degrees of observance. The Day of Atonement, as it is known — traditionally spent in fasting, prayer and introspection — represents the universal aspiration to self-improvement and to making amends. Last month, 32 nations — including Argentina, Canada, Israel, Nigeria and the United States — declared their support for adding Yom Kippur (Oct. 3-4 this year) to the United Nations calendar. Next month, a committee will take up the matter.

In 1999, Secretary General Kofi Annan acknowledged that, to observers, “it has sometimes seemed as if the United Nations serves all the world’s peoples but one: the Jews.” In 2006, his successor, Ban Ki-moon, told our organization, B’nai B’rith, that the United Nations should always be “a place where Jews and the State of Israel can feel at home.” Recently, Mr. Ban felt compelled to condemn an “upsurge in anti-Semitic attacks.”

One way to combat bigotry is by demonstrating respect. The Yom Kippur proposal is a nonpolitical one — unrelated to Israel’s recent hostilities with Hamas — and a test of inclusiveness. All 193 United Nations members, including the 56 in the Muslim bloc, should support it. □

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