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On behalf of the Union for Reform Judaism, whose over 900 congregations across North America encompass 1.5 million Reform Jews, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, which represents over 2,000 Reform rabbis, we submit these questions regarding the nomination of David Friedman as Ambassador to Israel. We urge Committee Members to make use of them during his nomination hearing.

The Reform Movement is the largest denomination in American Jewish life. We believe that a strong U.S.-Israel relationship is in the best interest of both nations. The United States has relied on Israel as a core ally in the difficult Middle East region. Israel has relied on the United States to strengthen its economic and security situations as it meets the many challenges it faces. We believe as well that Israel must remain a Jewish and democratic state. Israel fulfills a centuries-long dream of the Jewish people to have a secure homeland, and we are committed to preserving this reality.

Jewish tradition teaches that we are obligated to “seek peace and pursue it,” (Psalms 34:15). We seek a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that establishes two states: a secure Israel and an independent Palestine living side by side, and that addresses the final status issues of settlements, borders, refugees and Jerusalem. Although both sides have responsibilities to fulfill in the pursuit of peace, we cannot ignore the fact that its greatest impediment is terrorism. We strongly condemn the Palestinian incitements to violence and the veneration of terrorists. At this critical juncture, we believe that it is more important than ever that the United States remain committed to engagement in negotiations toward a two-state solution.

1. What do you see as your primary responsibilities as a U.S. ambassador? What is the role diplomacy plays in relations between nations and how, if at all, does modern diplomacy differ from that of ten, twenty or fifty years ago? What are the main channels through which you believe diplomacy should be conducted?
2. As an issue of existential importance for Jews worldwide, opinions on Israel within the Jewish community are diverse, and debate is active. Great sages of our tradition teach us that “debate for the sake of heaven” is healthy and even Divine (Pirkei Avot, 5:17). For this reason, it is important that the State Department, and particularly the U.S. Ambassador to Israel, maintain open and active dialogue with all organizations representing major constituencies of American Jews. How will you foster this dialogue? How do you plan to engage representatives of Jewish organizations representing a variety of perspectives on issues related to Israel?



The Religious Action Center pursues social justice and religious liberty by mobilizing the Reform Jewish community and serving as its advocate in Washington, D.C. The Center is led by the Commission on Social Action of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union for Reform Judaism (and its affiliates) and is supported by the congregations of the Union.



U.S.-Israel Relationship

3. The United States has been a steadfast friend and ally to Israel since its founding in 1948. Democratic and Republican administrations alike have advanced U.S. interests and bolstered a key partner by strengthening Israel as it meets the security and economic challenges of the day. What do you see as the core principles of the U.S.-Israel relationship?
4. The United States has taken a vital role in facilitating peace negotiations between Israel and her neighbors, including those which resulted in the Camp David accord, peace between Israel and Jordan, and the Oslo agreement. The U.S. strengthens Israel's security and advances its own national interest in the region through robust military aid. In September 2016, the United States and Israel agreed to a Memorandum of Understanding to provide \$38 billion to Israel over the next ten years. What will be your key priorities for the U.S.-Israel relationship?

Peace Negotiations and the Two-State Solution

5. The two-state solution is widely accepted as the only way to maintain Israel's Jewish and democratic character.¹ A one-state solution would force Israel to maintain its status as a Jewish state at the price of forfeiting its democratic nature. As Israel's closest ally and a major provider of aid for both Israel and the Palestinian Authority, the United States has historically taken a leadership role in brokering peace negotiations between the two parties. What are your goals for addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
6. For any negotiations to move forward, both partners must be prepared to engage in difficult discussions and to address the most pressing concerns. The Palestinian Authority's decision to take unilateral action at the UN violates the principle that peace must be directly negotiated between the two parties. How do you plan to hold Palestinian representatives accountable for their responsibilities in regards to the peace process and to facilitate conditions that foster Israel having a partner for peace?
7. The United Nations has a long and troubling record of hostility toward Israel. Resolutions that target Israel for undue scrutiny, such as the recent Security Council Resolution 2334 regarding settlements, are harmful to the peace process. Former Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, has stated that the disproportionate number of Security Council resolutions targeting Israel have "foiled the ability of the UN to fulfill its duty effectively."² In October 2016, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) passed a motion denying a Jewish connection to the Temple Mount and recognizing the site as holy for only the Islamic faith. How will you use the

¹ [Brookings, "Two States, Four Paths for Achieving Them."](#)

² [Independent, "Ban Ki-moon says UN has 'disproportionate' focus on Israel."](#)

United States' influence at the UN and on the international stage to ensure that Israel is treated fairly in these and other international forums?

Settlements

8. The presence and growth of settlements over the Green Line are a key issue within peace negotiations. Some 400,000 Jews live in settlements in the West Bank.³ American organizations like American Friends of Beit El Institutions, for which you serve as President, raises about \$2 million to support settlements each year.⁴ If confirmed as Ambassador to Israel, will you continue your strong support for settlements? How would you direct U.S. negotiations on the peace process regarding settlements?

U.S. Foreign Aid

9. U.S. economic aid to the Palestinian Authority provides support for the provision of services, including education and health care, to the Palestinian people. That in turn strengthens civil society and fosters stability. Would you support continuing to provide foreign aid to the PA? How do you view U.S. foreign aid to the PA in the context of peace negotiations and Israel's security more broadly?

Jerusalem

10. President-elect Trump has said he intends to move the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.⁵ How do you intend to ensure that any such move does not further damage an already ailing peace process?
11. One of the unresolved final status issues in peace negotiations is that of Jerusalem. Both Israel and the Palestinians claim Jerusalem as their capital, and negotiations often falter on the issue of how to accommodate these claims. Possible solutions to this tension include an internationally governed Jerusalem, a Jerusalem divided between Israel and Palestine, or maintaining the status quo of full Israeli control over Jerusalem. How would you propose resolving questions relating to the status of Jerusalem?

Security

12. It is widely recognized that Israel faces unique security challenges. Israel's security is not only crucial as the Jewish homeland, but also as a key U.S. ally in the region. What will be your top priorities for addressing Israel's pressing security needs?

³ [NPR, "7 Things to Know About Israeli Settlements."](#)

⁴ [Forward, "David Friedman Raised Millions for Radical West Bank Jewish Settlers."](#)

⁵ [The New York Times, "An Embassy in Jerusalem? Trump Promises, but So Did Predecessors."](#)

Refugees

13. In 1948, some 750,000 Arab refugees fled Israel to surrounding countries such as Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. The descendants of those refugees now number around 5 million, with many still living in refugee camps in Israel's neighboring countries.⁶ Addressing refugees is core to the peace negotiations. What is your view on how the United States should weigh in on negotiations related to refugees?

⁶ [United Nations Relief and Works Agency, "Palestine Refugees."](#)