

Local leaders condemn u-turn

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THE Netanyahu government's reversal of its plans for an egalitarian prayer space at the Kotel and its decision to retain the Orthodox rabbinate's monopoly on conversions have drawn fire from Australian Jewish leaders.

Zionist Federation of Australia (ZFA) president Danny Lamm, who is in Israel for Jewish Agency For Israel (JAFI) board of governors' meetings, said the ZFA "strongly endorses the resolution which was unanimously supported by JAFI regarding the Knesset decisions on the issues of conversion and on egalitarian prayer spaces at the Kotel".

Lamm joined a delegation from the JAFI board of governors at the Knesset, which met with a broad coalition of MKs asking the government to rescind the decisions.

"The conversion decision will potentially have a disastrous impact on hundreds of thousands of olim who have converted through authorities other than the Charedi Chief Rabbinate. The decision to freeze implementation of the creation of an egalitarian prayer space at the Kotel has alienated many Diaspora and Israeli Jews, who have been eagerly

anticipating its creation over the past few years."

Union for Progressive Judaism president Roger Mendelson said his organisation "is appalled at the blatantly political decision of the Israeli government in relation both to conversion and the Kotel.

"We are an active part of the largest grouping of affiliated Jews in the world and stand shoulder to shoulder with the supporters of religious pluralism in Israel.

"This decision is divisive and insulting. Our disgust is in no way directed to Israel but to the government. It offends not only our movement but virtually all liberal-minded Jews."

New Israel Fund president Liam Getreu described the backdown as "a cynical decision [that] panders to the ultra-Orthodox and their control over Jewish life in Israel".

"All Jews, no matter how they choose to practise, should be able to pray at the Kotel. It is a backwards step for the partnership between Israeli and Diaspora Jews," he said.

The Zionism Victoria plenum on Tuesday passed a motion affirming its commitment to an egalitarian prayer space and resolving to write to Netanyahu "urging him to rescind the government's decision".