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UPJ, ARZA and Mercaz-Masorti, Condemn Proposed Legislation Restricting Prayer at the Western Wall

We, the afore mentioned organisations, strongly condemn the advancement of legislation that would grant the **Chief Rabbinate** exclusive control over prayer at all areas of the **Western Wall**, one of Judaism's most sacred sites.

If enacted, the proposed law would effectively criminalise non-Orthodox Jewish worship, preventing Jews, particularly members of Masorti and Reform communities from holding prayer services at the Wall under the threat of imprisonment for up to seven years.

This is a law that targets Jews who are not orthodox and undermines the fundamental principle of freedom of religion. Its implications extend far beyond the Western Wall. This holy site belongs to the entire Jewish people and must not be subject to political control or religious coercion.

For the Australian Diaspora, this is more than a local Israeli dispute; it is a question of whether the Kotel remains a home for one wall for one people, or a site where the diversity of our tradition is legally erased. For the majority of Australian Jews who identify with Progressive, Reform, or Masorti traditions, these developments feel like a direct assault on the legitimacy of our own religious lives. The impact is profound and painful: at a time when the Israeli government is asking for our unwavering advocacy and support in the face of rising global antisemitism, it is simultaneously signaling that our Judaism is "second-class" or, worse, a legal transgression.

To be told that an egalitarian Bnei Mitzvah or a woman's prayer at the Kotel could be met with state-sanctioned penalties feels like a betrayal. It creates a sharp cognitive dissonance; we are asked to stand on the front lines for a state that is actively legislating against our right to exist as religious equals. It feels as though the State of Israel is criminalizing our very identity as Jews.:

We all have expressed grave concern that the legislation represents a dangerous precedent, entrenching exclusion and division within the Jewish world and eroding long-standing commitments to pluralism.

In response, we will formally write to the **Embassy of Israel in Australia**, urging immediate intervention to ensure that this bill does not become law.

Danny Hochberg and Larry Lockshin – UPJ Co-Presidents. **Ayal Marek** – ARZA President, UPJ Board member
Rabbi Allison Conyer- Chair, Assembly of Rabbis and Cantors of Australia, New Zealand and Asia
Eric Lundberg – President Mercaz-Masorti Australasia Inc **Maya Marek** - Federal Mazkira Netzer Australia