



Abrahamamic Initiative on the Middle East

Grounded in Abrahamamic Theology

December 18, 2013

The Honorable David Price
Room 2162 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Price,

The Abrahamamic Initiative on the Middle East (A.I.M.E.) recently was made aware of HR 938, the co-called "United States-Israel Strategic Partnership Act of 2013." We are writing to urge you to oppose passage of this bill in its current form.

If HR 938 is enacted into law as originally introduced, it would allow Israel to benefit from the United States' Visa Waiver program, under which designated countries' citizens are allowed to enter the U.S. without obtaining visas. Our concern is that this legislation does not require reciprocal treatment of all U.S. citizens seeking to enter Israel, regardless of race, religion or national origin.

Concerning travel of U.S. passport holders to Israel, the U.S. State Department warns that "all persons applying for entry to Israel, the West Bank, or Gaza...may be denied entry or exit without explanation," and further states that "U.S. citizens whom Israeli authorities suspect of being Arab, Middle Eastern, or Muslim origin may face additional, often time-consuming, and probing questioning by immigration and border authorities, or may be denied entry."

Several recent cases of Israeli denial of entry to U.S. citizens on these grounds have received media coverage, and some A.I.M.E. members have friends who have been denied entry to Israel because of their Palestinian parentage. As the State Department advisory notes, Palestinian-Americans are singled out for discriminatory treatment by Israel, including the obligation that they obtain and use a "Palestinian Authority passport", without which such U.S. citizens may be barred from entry or face serious delays at points of entry.

As people of faith, we ask that you stand up for the human rights of all U.S. citizens and insist that Israel honor freedom of movement guaranteed by U.S.-Israel treaty obligations. We ask that you support the following amendment to HR 938:

"Israel shall not be admitted into the Visa Waiver Program until the government has demonstrated that it has provided reciprocal travel privileges to all United States citizens without regard to their race, religion, national origin, or political beliefs."

We do not believe that Israel should be exempt from basic standards of equality, justice, and human rights for all. We urge you to work for inclusion of the above amendatory language and, if it is not included, to vote against passage of HR 938 when it reaches the House floor.

Sincerely yours,

Steering Committee, Abrahamamic Initiative on the Middle East:

Mark Davidson, Burhan Ghanayem, John Heinemeier, Miriam Thompson, Tom Trueblood