

CELEBRATING BALFOUR: TODAY, TOMORROW, FOREVER



Balfour Accomplished by Beverley-Jane Stewart



A Project of The Israel Forever Foundation

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WHY BALFOUR MATTERS

Imagine the world of European Jewry in 1917. So many streams of activity were taking place as World War I neared its end, with political and nationalistic endeavors taking center stage. Simultaneously, Jews were increasingly welcomed in some areas, while increasingly threatened in others.

Few people realize that only at this late date were some Jews finally receiving freedoms previously unknown in Eastern Europe, the Baltic States, Russia and elsewhere. While some sought an assimilated social reality in the arms of the cosmopolitan centers of the world, for others, the desire for Jewish freedom could be found in the creation of a home for the Jewish people in our ancient land.

Drawn from a long history of recognition of the Jewish connection to the Land of Israel, there was an undeniable link that had been respected by every faith, every race, every nation throughout history. For Jews throughout the world, the dream of a return to Zion has forever been a centerpiece of Jewish prayer and to which we have maintained ties for over 3000 years in exile. The reference to Palestine implied a Jewish land, long before the State of Israel was born. With the Balfour Declaration, this dream was finally affirmed by a world power who sought to help bring that dream to life.

We are now immersed in a different spectrum of activity, where politicized messages convolute the meaningful reality of Israel's existence. We are surrounded on all sides by messages of hate, and we trust in the good work being done by the advocacy organizations and representational bodies around the world helping to defend and protect the image of the Israel.

In the process of the growing conflict, growing division has occurred. We have forgotten that, with all of the diversity of the Jewish world, it is Israel that has the potential to unite us and provide a common ground. The importance of this concept and the history on which it is founded has been forgotten amidst the whirlwind of differing opinions, political ideologies. and conflicting narratives. Yet, indeed, it is Israel – this very land which bears the name of our People – that affirms our historical lineage and shall, with our collective initiative, continue to persevere.

Of all the nations in the world, it is the Children of Israel who have outlasted every attempt of destruction. It was here we were made into a people; it was here that the first Jewish state thrived. It was here that we won, lost, killed and were killed to defend our right to be

here in this one small place of the world we can call our own. After 2000 years in forced exile, the dream of Jerusalem, Zion, Israel has remained a constant part of our Jewish soul, prayer, community and identity.

It makes sense that, in the world of 1917, a statement of support for this dream could awaken a deep appreciation for our ancient heritage that binds us as one.

We at The Israel Forever Foundation hope to reignite that feeling of appreciation and evoke a demonstration of commitment to the continued existence of our one and only Jewish state. As we now arrive at 100 years since the Balfour Declaration, we invite you to honor one of the many steps of history that helped bring about the establishment of the State of Israel by making YOUR declaration, in the spirit of Balfour, to sustain the memory and understanding of this first “international birth certificate,” protecting its legacy, and demonstrating that you, too, recognize our right to exist, as a people, as a nation, and as a state on our only ancestral land.

We each feel, from our different corners of the world, a connection with the hills where our ancestors walked, the communities where they lived and were buried, where our holy Temple once stood, and where our history is rooted. We each embrace differing ideologies and have our own opinions on the state of affairs in Israel today. But in honor of Balfour Day, we invite you to leave your politics at the door.

Let us celebrate what unites us.

Let us always stand up for Jewish rights.

And let us take a moment, every year, to reflect, remind, and celebrate the monumental victories that have achieved throughout the years - on Balfour Day, and every day.

Dr. Elana Heideman



Executive Director
The Israel Forever Foundation

A PIVOTAL MOMENT IN HISTORY

On October 31, 1917, the British Cabinet approved a one-sentence statement of policy regarding its plans for Palestine. Two days later, on November 2, 1917, the Jewish people received public support for the Nation's ancient hope, when British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour sent a letter to the leader of the Zionist Federation, Lord Rothschild, expressing British support of a Jewish State in Palestine:

“

His Majesty's government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

”

The first official recognition of Jewish national rights by a significant world power, through the 67 words of what became known as the Balfour Declaration, the British government committed itself to the rebirth of the national home for the Jewish people, recognizing the long-standing philosophical, practical, historical, and spiritual link of the Jewish nation to the Land of Israel and, subsequently, facilitating the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine.



First Zionist Congress

“

With one step the Jewish cause has made a great bound forward...a new epoch for our race...Amidst all that is so dark and dismal and tragic throughout the world, there has thus arisen for the Jews a great light. It is the perceptible lifting of the cloud of centuries, the palpable sign that the Jew-condemned for two thousand years to unparalleled wrong – is at last coming to his right.

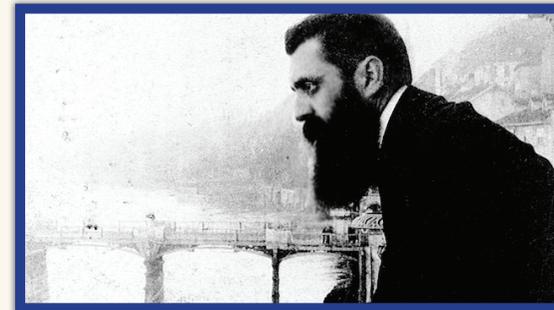
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Jewish Chronicle, 1917

FROM HERZL TO BALFOUR: FOSTERING THE JEWISH NATIONAL DREAM

The Balfour Declaration was the single most significant step in restoring Jewish self-determination in their historic territories through political means. In the spirit of Theodor Herzl and in affirmation of his vision, the Zionist dream was propelled forward toward potential fulfillment.

The Jews who will it shall achieve their State. We shall live at last as free men on our own soil, and in our own homes peacefully die. The world will be liberated by our freedom, enriched by our wealth, magnified by our greatness. And whatever we attempt there for our own benefit will resound mightily and beneficially to the good of all mankind.



Theodor Herzl

“

Zionism demands a publicly recognized and legally secured homeland in Palestine for the Jewish people... Our first objective is the obtaining of sovereignty, assured by international law.

”

Theodor Herzl

Herzl believed strongly in the potential for British support for Zionism. In 1900, Herzl opened the Fourth Zionist Congress in London with a prophetic proclamation: "England, great England, freedom-loving England, overlooking all the seas, will understand and sympathize with the aims and aspirations of Zionism. From here the idea of Zionism will soar higher and further."

From the onset, the movement for the return of the Jewish nation to its ancestral homeland echoed in the hearts of Jews scattered around the world.

At every opportunity, the leaders of the Zionist movement sought out those who understood the purpose, vision, and goals of creating a place where Jews could finally live free, where the social, ethical, civic, political, and spiritual realms would be continuously intermingled with the essence of Jewish peoplehood and identity in the Land of Israel.

“The opportunities are very great, greater than at any time in eighteen centuries. The non-Jewish world is with us... But the responsibility for success or failure will rest, not upon anti-Zionists or non-Zionists, but upon ourselves. The loyalty, the wisdom, the virtues of the relatively few who have declared their conviction of the truth of Zionism will determine whether the future shall bring success or failure.”

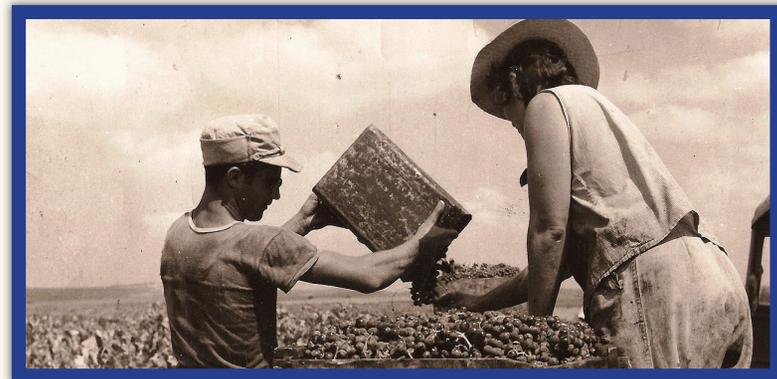
We shall be buoyed up by the spiritual appeal and the irresistible beauty of Palestine. We shall toil in confidence and with the eager impulse for justice for all. There will be developed a new Jewish civilization worthy of the Jewish past, worthy of the aspirations for the future. And from the old Home, restored in fulfillment of prayers and striving, there will go out again to the world in all its troubles the light for which nations will bless Israel again.

Louis Brandeis

In addition to the political and strategic asset of a Jewish state in the region, senior British decision makers, as well as their American and international counterparts who later affirmed the Declaration, were intellectually and spiritually aligned with the goals of the Zionist movement.

“What has from the first been the real aim of the Jews? It has been to re-establish in Palestine a Jewish civilization. To the Jew, Palestine is Eretz Israel--the land of Israel-- and they call it that for thousands of years. In the mind of Balfour, his adherence to Zionism was due to his belief that if the Jews were enabled to build up their civilization in Palestine once again, it had something of real constructive value to the world, and that the Jews in their old home would again produce, as they did in the past, and release great spiritual forces that fostered a desire to help the Jews from oppression into freedom.”

Honorable William Ormsby-Gore, British Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies



Pioneers working the land

THE POWER OF WORDS: THE LEADERSHIP BEHIND BALFOUR

Balfour's letter to Zionist leader Lord Rothschild was only one of a series of British wartime communications regarding the fate of the Levant with a variety of political leaders, including Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner for Egypt, Hussein Ibn Ali, Sharif of Mecca, and the secret Anglo-French agreement between Sir Mark Sykes and Charles Georges-Picot - all of whom were no less consequential in the shaping of the contemporary Middle East.

Having already entered into negotiations over the region with its wartime allies, Britain's efforts to divide Palestine began with the Sykes-Picot accord of 1916. The conflicting interests required special consideration, causing David Lloyd George, who became prime minister of Britain at the close of 1916, to seek a redistribution of

the land allocation to the benefit of Britain and, ultimately, the Zionist movement.



Balfour with Chaim Weizmann in Tel Aviv

Subsequently, at a private meeting on February 7, 1917, Sykes met with the foremost leaders and sympathizers of the Zionist movement, hinting toward a potential conditional recognition of the Zionist endeavor in exchange for their assistance in negotiations with the French. Recognizing the diplomatic talents of Nahum Sokolow, he was sent as the representative statesman of the potential British-Zionist alliance, the resulting success was significant: On June 4, 1917, French Leader Jules Cambon, head of the French Foreign Ministry, issued a letter that emphasized the French sympathy and care toward the just cause of Jewish nationalism:

“You were good enough to present the project to which you are devoting your efforts, which has for its object the development of Jewish colonization in Palestine. You consider that, circumstances permitting, and the independence of the Holy Places being safeguarded on the other hand, it would be a deed of justice and of reparation to assist, by the protection of the Allied Powers, in the renaissance of the Jewish nationality [nationalité juive] in that land from which the people of Israel were exiled so many centuries ago.

The French government, which entered this present war to defend a people wrongly attacked, and which continues the struggle to assure the victory of right over might, can but feel sympathy for your cause, the triumph of which is bound up with that of the Allies.

I am happy to give you herewith such assurance.

As support for Zionism grew, one thing was clear:

“The Balfour Declaration did not legitimate Zionism. It was Zionism, through its truth, integrity, and diplomatic efforts, that legitimated the Balfour Declaration.”

Martin Kramer

Under the leadership of Chaim Weizmann, the statesmanship of Nahum Sokolow and Lord Rothschild, and the assistance of the Zionist leadership, Balfour's support of Jewish nationalism bestowed the most prominent step forward for the World Zionist Organization since its inception.



Imperial Conference 1917

Their combined efforts required an accurate wording of this unique expression of support, requiring many drafts, meetings, and compromises. As early as 1915, the Zionist Federation had issued a petition to the British government asking for, “the establishment of a publicly recognized and legally secured home for the Jewish People in Palestine, as formulated by the Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897,” which, after the liberation from Turkish rule, would recognize Jewish rights, enable free immigration, and legalize the status of Zionist institutions.

On July 17, 1917, members of the British Zionist leadership gathered at the Imperial Hotel in London to advance their goals. Leopold Amery, who had been in attendance and intimately involved with the production of the final proclamation, clarified the purposeful wording when he stated,

“The phrase ‘the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people’ was intended and understood by all concerned to mean at the time of the Balfour Declaration that Palestine would ultimately become a ‘Jewish Commonwealth’ or a ‘Jewish state,’ if only Jews came and settled there in sufficient numbers.”

The final letter, however, addressed to the attention of Lord Walter Lionel Rothschild, then Honorary President of the Zionist Federation and the most important figure in the Anglo-Jewish community, did not include the word “re-establishment” that the originators hoped would emphasize the continuity of the Jewish presence in Palestine and its history and heritage with this land.

Furthermore, they were aware that their hopeful inclusion of the word “state” would prevent any misunderstanding of the intent of the British government in their proclamation of support for the fulfillment of Jewish nationalist dream.

Fear of opposition and political implications resulted in the specific language ensconced in the final draft of 67 words. But it was Balfour himself who affirmed the original vision in 1918, expressing fervently that he hoped “Jews will make good in Palestine and eventually found a state.” This sentiment was echoed by Prime Minister Lloyd George who confirmed publicly that when the Jews would be a majority in Palestine, “Palestine would become a Jewish Commonwealth.”

Despite the moderate and careful wording, the Balfour Declaration was the first political triumph for Jewish nationalism and the Zionists. It was the culmination of years of effort to gain global support.



Sir Herbert Samuel reading it aloud to Jews and Arabs in Jerusalem
Photo courtesy of Library of Congress

At the time, the scope of a “national home,” was uncertain, and how it would be different from a state was unknown. But one thing was clear: the term “home” meant a home for all Jews, not just those residing in Palestine at the time. This national home was to be for the entire Jewish nation, which had been scattered throughout the world since their expulsion from the Land of Israel in 76 BCE when the Romans conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, and renamed the land “Palestine” so as to disconnect it from its Jewish roots.

BALFOUR AND JEWISH ANCESTRAL RIGHTS

The bond between the Jewish People and the Land was unshakable, outlasting thousands of years in exile.

“A member of the House of Lords once asked Chaim Weizmann, “Why do you Jews insist on Palestine when there are so many undeveloped countries you could settle in more conveniently?”

Weizmann responded: “That is like my asking you why you drove twenty miles to visit your mother last Sunday when there are so many old ladies living on your street.”



Lord Edmund Allenby, Lord Arthur James Balfour, Sir Herbert Samuel
Courtesy of American Colony

The refusal to accept other geographical locations emphasized this fact, as Chaim Weizmann forcefully stated the case in 1906 after the British-sponsored Uganda Plan: “We cannot possibly sell our birthright. It is like someone giving up one’s religion, giving up one’s self.” This rejection prompted the first meeting between Weizmann and Balfour, one of the proposers of the plan.

Balfour was impressed by the Zionist determination that a homeland for the Jews could only be reestablished in the land of their forefathers. Embedded in the words of his letter to Lord Rothschild was a reflection of his spiritual appreciation of the Jewish heritage that bound them to that small slice of land in the challenging region for the sake of their past, their honor, and their future connection with Zion, their rightful place.



The Jews are the most gifted race that mankind has seen since the Greeks of the fifth century. They have been exiled, scattered and oppressed. If we can find them an asylum, a safe home, in their native land, then the full flowering of their genius will burst forth and propagate.

Arthur James Balfour.



A gift of hope from the British people to the Jews and other communities of Palestine, Balfour's declaration of support reflected the recognition of the 3,000 year indigenous link to the land.



Celebrating the recognition of Israel



The love of British People to the People that gave the world the Bible, has found the finest and most energetic expression, during Your Majesties' reign, in the Balfour Declaration for the founding of a National Homeland for the Jewish People in its own land. Like Cyrus, King of Persia in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, so have Your Majesties called out to this People, scattered and dispersed: Whosoever there is among you whose heart is to Zion, let him go up and build his National Home!

Meir Dizengoff in a letter to King George V, 1935



The Balfour Declaration showed an understanding of the desire for the Jewish people to return to their land since the forced exiles that spread the Jewish nation to the four corners of the world.

As Lord Rothschild exclaimed upon receiving the letter, "We are met on the most momentous occasion in the history of Judaism for the last eighteen hundred years." This acknowledgement lent Zionism an international legitimacy enjoyed by few national movements before or since.

THE DECLARATION HEARD AROUND THE WORLD

From England to Russia to Palestine, the United States and beyond, the resounding impact of the British proclamation evoked celebration and elation for the Jews, and increased support from world leaders.



The great miracle has taken place. The mightiest of world powers, whose army is now approaching the gates of Jerusalem has officially declared the 'establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. Ever since our last national disaster, the defeat of Bar Kochba, we The Hebrew nation have not existed as a political or national entity nor been a factor in international affairs. The Jews were hated and despised. Without the framework of a homeland, the nation broke up into little pieces, scattered like fragments of a broken vessel... But a miracle happened and the broken vessel was made whole again. That which we believed in has come to pass: we are again a nation.

It had to be, because our faith in the national resurrection of the Jewish people never faltered. After 35 years of pioneering endeavor in which the nation proved it was capable of restoring ruins of its Land, after 20 years of national-political activity which opens the eyes of the world to the Jewish people's longing for their homeland-the mightiest of the world powers declared that it officially recognized the existence of the Hebrew people and undertakes to help establish that people's national home in Eretz Yisrael.

David Ben Gurion, November 14, 1917





With the good news of the Balfour declaration, the town dressed itself in its festival finery, joyous with happiness. No words can describe the soul-uplifting feeling and raised spirits that gripped the Jews of Sokółka. The Land of Israel for the Jewish people! In Białystok Street, the group crushed together at a massive national festival: the shops closed, the artisans stopped working, and the wagon drivers rested their horses. The Jews congregated in the synagogues, parades marched through the streets, school-children together with their parents appeared in rows of four wearing homemade colored hats waving flags of Zion they had made themselves. David-Yitzhak and his orchestra claimed a place on the Bimah of the synagogue playing nationalist songs. All present split the air with their raised voices and inexhaustible excitement. Downtrodden, suppressed, a target for contempt and ridicule among the nations who saw them as a scapegoat - they suddenly straightened their backs and stood up straight.

Sokolka, Russia Community Archives



Reading Balfour Declaration in the newspaper, Sokolka Russia

Rav Kook, later the first Ashkenazi chief rabbi of British Mandatory Palestine was among those to revel in the declaration and see its potential to encourage Zionists to continue pursuing their goals. As he proclaimed, "I have come here not just to thank the British nation, but even more, to congratulate it for the privilege of making this declaration."

The announcement received widespread support in British Public opinion: 33 governmental advisory privy councilors, more than 200 members of parliament, 14 bishops of the Church of England, 8 bishops of the Roman Catholic Church, and the heads of several

other religious denominations in the United Kingdom expressed their concurrence with the British statement of policy regarding the Jewish National Home. The British press widely welcomed the declaration, and the three major political parties – Conservative, Liberal, and Labor endorsed it.



Celebrating the creation of the State of Israel in 1948

In addition to their support of a political and strategic asset of a Jewish state in the region, many of the key senior British decision-makers, as well as their American and international counterparts who later affirmed the Declaration, were intellectually and religiously aligned with the goals of the Zionist movement. As Lord Balfour proclaimed at the Royal Albert Hall in 1920, the British saw themselves as "partners in this great enterprise." British Prime Minister David Lloyd George proudly affirmed this when he proclaimed:



The Jews surely have a special claim on [Palestine]. They are the only people who have made a success of it during the past 3,000 years. They are the only people who have made its name immortal, and as a race, they have no other home. This was their first; this has been their only home; they have no other home. They found no home in Egypt or in Babylon. Since their long exile they have found no home as a people in any other land, and this is the time and opportunity for enabling them once more to recreate their lives as a separate people in their old home and to make their contribution to humanity as a separate people, having a habitation in the land which inspired their forefathers. Later on it might be too late.



For a short period, even the leader of the Arab world supported this first step toward the fulfillment of the Jewish national dream and destiny.



The Arabs, especially the educated among us, look with deepest sympathy on the Zionist movement..We will wish the Jews a hearty welcome home. We are working together for a reformed and revised Near East and our two movements complete one another. The Jewish movement is nationalist and not imperialist. And there is room for us both. Indeed, I think that neither can be a real success without the other.

Amir Faisal



Amir Faisal and the first Israeli president Chaim Weizmann, January 3, 1919

The Zionists received many other endorsements as well. One of these endorsement came from Woodrow Wilson whose endorsement eased any doubt as to whether the Balfour Declaration conformed to the new rule of the international order.



There should be no more realization of imperialistic aims, but a general movement toward the self-determination right for the liberation of nations

U.S. President Woodrow Wilson



The Balfour Declaration was a product of post-colonialism, at a time of growing international consensus towards self-determination for all peoples. In exploring the notion of conflicting promises to Jews and Arabs one must recognize that, in fact, both promises had been fulfilled with the formation of the Jewish State in Israel in 1948, and the formation of 22 Arab States in a holistic arc around Israel, including TransJordan as the first of them all, created in 1922, which was formed out of 82% of the Palestinian Mandate all of which had originally been designated for the Jewish homeland.

The Balfour Declaration was a welcome British gesture of recognition of Jewish self-determination in their historical homeland as 'of right not on sufferance' without in any way compromising the rights of Arabs to self-determination.

Professor David Stone



Unfortunately, in spite of the initial positive reception by Amir Faisal, the Arabs of Palestine focused their attention solely on the defamation and destruction of the Jewish presence, the Zionist agenda, the distortion of historical fact, and the rejection of the numerous opportunities offered to them to establish their own state in the region.

Upon being asked by Musa Kazim el Hesseini, former Mayor of Jerusalem, to denounce the declaration, Winston Churchill responded,



It is not in my power to do so, nor, if it were in my power, would it be my wish. The British Government have passed their word, by the mouth of Mr. Balfour, that they will view with favour the establishment of a National Home for Jews in Palestine, and that inevitably involves the immigration of Jews into the country.

Moreover, it is manifestly right that the Jews, who are scattered all over the world, should have a national centre and a National Home where some of them may be reunited. And where else could that be but in this land of Palestine, with which for more than 3,000 years they have been intimately and profoundly associated.



Thus, the Balfour Declaration created the opportunity to propel forward the foundations toward an embryonic Jewish state in Mandate Palestine, establishing a democratic, political, and financial system, for the Jewish and non-Jewish communities. Britain was henceforth responsible for overseeing the political and administrative management, as well as ensuring that economic conditions would secure the establishment of the Jewish National Home, facilitate Jewish immigration, and encourage the settlement of Jews on the land in a manner that would benefit all of the land's inhabitants.



Independence Hall and the Balfour declaration, Balfour Day commemoration, Tel Aviv

AN INNOVATION IN INTERNATIONAL LAW

The Balfour Declaration has a rich, complex, multi-causal explanation: it came about as the result of a historically unique set of personal, political, and geostrategic circumstances. The Zionist representatives brought the many endorsements for the declaration to the peace conference in Paris in February 1919. In the era before the United Nations and the League of Nations, there existed no higher international forum than this.

“It was at once clear that a great moment in the history of the Jewish people had arrived through this Declaration ... In the midst of this terrible war, you, as representatives of the Great Powers of Western Europe and America, have issued a declaration which contained the promise to help us, with your goodwill and support, to establish this national center, for whose realization generations have lived and suffered.”

Nahum Sokolow, Paris Peace Conference of 1919”

Officially submitted to and approved by the Council of the League of Nations in July 1922, the crucial message of the Balfour Declaration was inserted in the text of the mandate and was perceived as an integral part of its implementation. As it was written:

“Whereas the Principal Allied Powers have agreed... (according to) the provisions of the Covenant of the League of Nations.. to entrust the Government of His Britannic Majesty as the Mandatory... responsible for putting into effect the declaration of November 2, 1917...
Whereas recognition has thereby been given to the historical connection of the Jewish People with Palestine and to the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country.”

Resolution of the League of Nations at San Remo

The Mandate for Palestine was subsequently approved by all 52 members of the League of Nations. Subsequently, the Balfour Declaration was transformed and codified into international law.

“If we cast our minds back to the situation that existed prior to the Balfour Declaration, only then can we perhaps grasp the vast extent, the colossal impact of the transformation that was wrought in our status and our prospects for the future; only then can we fully appreciate the magnitude of the achievement. It was a major innovation in international law. It amounted to the introduction of basic concepts of political Zionism into the framework of the laws of nations, and the inclusion of these concepts within the political consciousness of the world.”

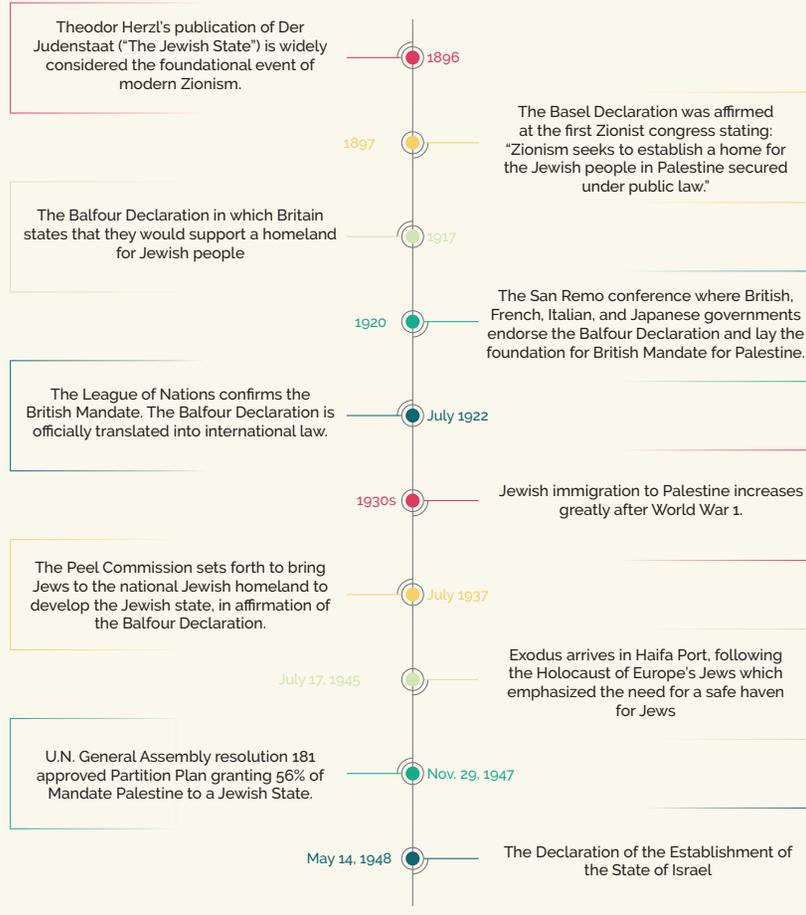
Second Prime Minister of Israel Moshe Sharett”



Jewish community parade to commemorate the Balfour Declaration

STEPS TOWARD STATEHOOD

The Balfour Declaration paved the way for the United Nations vote on November 29, 1947, when the world echoed Lord Balfour's sentiments of our ancestral right to a sovereign state on our ancient homeland.



“The State of Israel was established by the pen and the law, and defended by the sword, in contrast to most other countries in the world that were established by the sword.”

Alan Dershowitz

TURNING DREAM INTO REALITY

Amid the excitement, controversy, and feelings of skepticism were also prevalent responses to the declaration, from both the Jewish and non-Jewish world.

Following continuing talks with political leaders, Chaim Weizmann, president of the English Zionist Federation, cautioned his fellow Zionists against the illusion that, with the issuance of the Balfour Declaration, a Jewish state in Palestine was automatically assured. He warned that only by unremitting practical work in Palestine, which would require the moral and the financial support of the masses of the Jewish people, could Jewish aspirations to statehood be fulfilled.

By the late 1930s, Britain was progressively retreating from the commitment laid forth by Balfour. The situation in Mandate Palestine was becoming increasingly volatile. The Arab population attempted to force the British to cut Jewish immigration to Palestine and to cease construction to Jewish villages, towns and cities and increased their “retaliatory” actions against the Jews. The British response was to limit Jewish immigration and land purchases with the White Paper of 1939, providing weapons to the Arabs while doing little to subside the increasing violence and riots against the Jewish population in the Land.



Lord Arthur Balfour points out a feature of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to Governor Sir Ronald Storrs during a visit to Jerusalem, April 1925 [Getty]

The White Paper, which informed British policy throughout World War II, blocked Jewish immigration to Palestine at precisely the moment when the Jews of Europe faced destruction. Attempting to set Palestine on a course to become an Arab state with a Jewish minority, the Exodus affair demonstrated the extent to which it was willing to go to impose itself even on the Jewish right of return to their ancestral homeland.

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Despite all of the arguments surrounding the Balfour Declaration, Israel's legitimacy does not rest on it or even on the 1947 UN Resolution 181 to partition the country to two states: one Jewish and the other Arab. It rests (legally) on the fact of its continuing existence, assertion and vindication of independence by its people and by force of arms, an organized government within territory under its control and recognition by the generality of nations.

Avi Ben Hur



Celebrating in the streets of Tel Aviv after UN Resolution 181.

It was up to the Jewish people to continue to fight for their land and never give up on the Zionist vision. As Zalman Shoval acknowledged, “the State of Israel would have been established with or without the Balfour Declaration,” and it was up to them to build the land and instill in each and every Jew the Zionist dream.

“

The task is heavy. The problems are many. The difficulties are serious. But the problem can be solved, the difficulties can be overcome. And they will be. Of this we have assurance in notable achievements, wrought by determination and self-sacrifice throughout the long centuries of adversity. This new task will be different. Though the burden is heavy it will be joyously borne. For we shall be buoyed up by the spiritual appeal and the irresistible beauty of Palestine. We shall toil on confident and with the eager impulse for justice for all. There will be developed a new Jewish civilization worthy of the Jewish past, worthy of the aspirations for the future. And from the old Home, restored in fulfillment of prayers and striving, there will go out again to the world in all its troubles the light for which nations will bless Israel again.

US Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, 1916

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BALFOUR TODAY AND EVERY DAY

It was thirty years after the Balfour Declaration that the Jewish people declared independence in Palestine and formally established the modern State of Israel, utilizing its ratification in the League of Nations as part of its historic legitimacy and justification henceforth referenced in the Declaration of Independence signed May 15, 1948. Questions over the integrity of the Declaration have fueled a seemingly unending historical and historiographic debate. Yet one thing is clear: from its inception to its transformation into international law, the Balfour Declaration stands out as a monumental historical milestone in the steps to statehood.



Balfour celebration, Savoy Hotel UK, London 1917

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When the fuller story is told, the Balfour Declaration is no longer a British imperial grab but the outcome of a carefully constructed consensus of the leading democracies of the day. It is no longer in tension with the principle of self-determination, but a statement made possible by the very champion of the principle. And it is no longer an emanation of secret dealings but one of the first and most influential instances of public diplomacy.

It is, in short, not a throwback to the 19th century but an opening to the 20th.

Martin Kramer

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As the Jewish State continues to fight an enduring battle against delegitimization, demonization, terror as well as attempts to destroy the Jewish State, Balfour serves as a reminder that Israel was

established with the full backing and support of the international community.



The Balfour declaration did not create the right to Jewish self-determination. Nonetheless, that this right was recognised by a world power for the first time suggests that the declaration cannot be seen as anything except a crucial milestone on the path to Jewish independence. It is a cause for celebration.

Israel's Ambassador to Britain Mark Regev



Balfour provides compelling evidence that Israel's right to statehood was universally recognized and unassailable.

It provides us with a chance, year in and year out, to underline our internationally recognized right to be here, something which far too many people around the world seem to have forgotten.

Michael Freund



Just as the Balfour Declaration declared the historical right to sovereignty in the Jewish Homeland of Israel, so too, must that stand true and be reaffirmed today and forever.



Balfour In Rishon



Official announcement print of the Balfour Declaration, 1917
Courtesy of David Matlow

13 Cheshvan 5778
November 2 2017

Honorable Lord Arthur James Balfour,

First and foremost, allow me to express our deep regret over the delay in response.

The Zionist leaders welcomed Lord Rothschild's message in which His Majesty's Government provided its recognition to the Zionist desire to establish a Jewish national home in its historical homeland - Israel.

With a profound sense of gratitude for all your efforts promoting this goal, we wish to inform you that the endeavor was successful, and that the State of Israel was founded and serves as the national home of the Jewish people, welcoming Jews from all countries of the Diaspora.

The State of Israel was founded on the basis of our natural and historical rights given by His Majesty's 1917 declaration supporting the reconstitution and reestablishment of a Jewish national home for the Jewish nation.

We have since witnessed the emergence of a unique country that upholds national and social standards as envisaged by the prophets of Israel.

100 years after the Declaration of the British government, Israel today is a Jewish and democratic country, deeply dedicated to the development of all its citizens and the advancement of freedom, justice and peace. Israel is doing its utmost to ensure equality of social and political rights to all its citizens, and strives to safeguard diversity of language, religion and conscience, regardless of sexual orientation or race.

The Israeli Knesset attracts a wide range of parliamentarians representing different parts of our society's views, showcasing the diversity and complexity of our culture. Israeli women are actively engaged in key roles in leadership, and serve as judges and high-level officials in our security forces. Israel guarantees complete freedom of worship to all religious groups.

The State of Israel is a Jewish and democratic state which guarantees all minority rights. You can find Arab judges and leading Druze and Bedouin Army officers that are involved in our national security and are fully involved in academia, medicine, the economy and industry. Israel has signed peace agreements with its neighbor to the East – Jordan, and to the south – Egypt. It strives to achieve additional peace agreements with many other countries in the region. It maintains diplomatic relations with over 160 countries and is contentiously involved in a persistent struggle against terrorism. It has demonstrated ways to successfully combat these security issues to dozens of countries around the world.

Israel is a powerhouse of breakthrough innovation in the fields of technology, science, health, agriculture, communications and cyber technology.

The Israel Defense Force is considered as one of the most moral armies in the world. Male soldiers serve alongside female soldiers, all coming from diverse religious and secular backgrounds in units that showcase many non-Jewish minorities. The IDF maintains aid missions to natural disaster-stricken areas and shares its knowledge with many world powers fighting against terrorism.

Yet as it happens in many countries even our country has its vulnerabilities and has to combat acts of violence racism and crime. The State of Israel spares no effort in this regard, and invests considerable resources in order to deal adequately with these issues.

I wish to draw your attention to the fact that even today, 100 years after the Declaration of His Majesty's Government, the Jewish People still find themselves fighting against rising anti-semitism, incitement, prejudice, humiliation, and deal constantly with injuries to body and soul. Europe continues to be a major arena for antisemitic and anti-Israel activities.

Sadly, even today, in the year 2017, we are seeing in Britain an alarming rise in antisemitism.

Sadly we observe many antisemitic ideas quietly infiltrating the Labor Party strongholds, weakening and departing from your original values while spreading hatred to various political and media outlets in the British kingdom. We find in many neighboring countries on the European continent like France and Belgium a powerful wave of antisemitism that is forcing many Jews to hide their Jewish religious identity.

Unfortunately, the League of Nations organization that later became the United Nations continuously involves itself with the persecution and hatred of Jews. The treasured values of equality mentioned in your declaration are flagrantly violated by many world nations, who purposely turn a blind eye to this.

Ironically we observe many obsessively point the finger of blame directly towards us - the only country in the region that maintains a staunch commitment to and respect for human rights, and to the minorities living in its midst.

The 2017 United Nations is attempting to officially sever the Jewish people's ancient historical heritage ties to its national homeland. Our Arab neighbors are currently demanding from Britain to renounce the Balfour Declaration and its implications and are threatening legal action against Britain if it refuses to do so.

Honorable Lord Balfour, 100 years have passed since your government has recognized our right to reconstitute a national home in Israel. Our national homeland gathered millions of Jews from all over the Diaspora; highly educated professionals, well-versed in the sciences and technology, bringing progress and making our country a thriving leader in dozens of fields.

We are committed to a future in which we will build, rebuild and improve, conscientiously sustaining our position as beacon of hope for the entire region, founded on the basis of freedom, independence and equality.

With gratitude and appreciation,

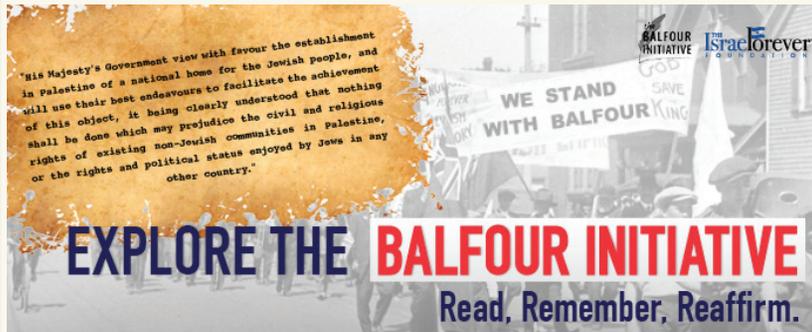
Yaakov Hagoel

Vice Chairman



World Zionist Organization

Join us in commemorating the 100 year anniversary of the Declaration and revive our collective commitment and affirmation of its legacy



About the Balfour Initiative

The Balfour Initiative aims to highlight the history that led to the monumental international recognition of Jewish rights and one of many steps toward the re-establishment of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel. Content, resources and programs serve to engage learners of all ages in an exploration of the events leading up to and following the declaration, as well as its relevance today as a global recognition of the historic and indigenous rights of the Jewish People.

www.balfourinitiative.org

About The Israel Forever Foundation

The Israel Forever Foundation develops and promotes experiential learning resources and initiatives to celebrate and strengthen the personal connection to Israel as an integral part of Jewish life and identity. Our content and programming aim to engage and inspire Diaspora Jews as Virtual Citizens of Israel to foster understanding, respect, involvement and pride in our ancestral connection with our heritage, history and homeland.

www.israelforever.org



Foreign Office,
November 2nd, 1917.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet

"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country"

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Arthur Balfour