

# Dubious honour given JNF's history

By **Edward C. Corrigan** - Tuesday, April 8th, 2008



University of Western Ontario President Davenport has accepted an award from the Jewish National Fund despite the protest of 36 faculty members.

Many individuals, including Jews, contend the JNF is a racist organization that discriminates against non-Jews. A letter signed by two Jewish organizations and 34 individual Jewish signatories protests a JNF event at Windsor Castle to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the founding of Israel. Israeli Uri Davis's book, *Israel: An Apartheid State* details the discriminatory policies of the JNF. Davis spoke at Western in 2005.

In 1995, an Israeli Arab couple, the Kadans, tried to lease an apartment on land owned by the JNF. For 10 years the JNF and Israeli Lands Authority refused to lease this land to non-Jews. Eventually the Supreme Court ruled state land could not be leased to Jews-only.

Unfortunately, 93 per cent of the land in Israel excludes non-Jews. The ruling caused embarrassment among Jews worldwide. Many asked how Jews could protest against anti-Semitism when condoning such practices in Israel? America's Jewish Reform Movement, to which most American Jews adhere, condemned the practice.

Former Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem, Meron Benvenisti, wrote in 2006 in the Israeli daily Ha'aretz "it's well known that the 'national institutions' – the Jewish Agency and Jewish National Fund – primarily exist to enable institutional discrimination based on ethnicity while clearing the state from accusations that it deviates from universal norms common to liberal democracies."

To avoid overturning the practice held to be racist the JNF has adopted policies to circumvent the law.

Israeli Attorney General Menachem Mazuz, in 2005, forbade the Jewish National Fund from issuing tenders for Jews only. To quote Benvenisti, "And once again, a way was found to circumvent the decision through "land swaps," which only strengthened the JNF as a discriminatory institution with racist policies."

The JNF continued the discriminatory practice with state authorities refusing to enforce the ruling. The JNF launched a campaign to reverse the decision.

In 2007, a JNF Bill was introduced to continue the discriminatory practice, which passed on first reading 64-16. The implications are clear. If Israel is a Jewish state then it cannot be a state for all its citizens.

In Israel, 25 per cent of the population is non-Jewish, severely discriminated against and denied basic democratic and social rights. The bill prompted Israel's newspaper, Ha'aretz, to publish an editorial titled, "A racist Jewish state".

The late and prominent member of the London Jewish community, Bernard Wolfe, who I had the privilege of knowing, challenged the restrictive covenant that barred Jews, Catholics and Blacks from living in the Beaches o' Pines resort in Grand Bend. As a result of this challenge and others, such restrictive covenants have been declared illegal in Canada.

Would Davenport accept an award from the South African apartheid state? Would he accept an award from an organization that discriminated against Jews? I hope he would not accept such a dubious honour.

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