

YOM HAATZMA'UT

Educational Resource Guide

The State of Israel was established on Friday, 14th May 1948. That date was chosen because it was the day before the British Mandate for Palestine was due to end. This was the fulfillment of the decision by the United Nations 6 months earlier, on November 29, 1947. These last six months of the British Mandate in Palestine were also the bloodiest period of the Mandate. A civil war was fought between local Arabs and Jews after the Arab population of Palestine violently rejected the partition plan agreed upon by the United Nations.

In addition to this civil war, the five armies of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq threatened the Jewish population of Palestine that they would invade the country should the Jewish people declare independence. Even though the United States had supported the idea of Jewish independence, in the UN vote of November 1947, they now advised against Jewish independence in Palestine. Their assessment was that should the Jewish State be declared, the subsequent Arab invasion would result in the extermination of the Jewish population of Palestine.

The man responsible for deciding whether to declare independence for the Jewish people was the chairman of the Jewish Agency, David Ben-Gurion. In the week leading up to the termination of the British Mandate, Ben Gurion asked his military advisers what the chances of survival for the state should independence be declared. His advisors told him the new State would have a 50% chance of survival.

Despite the lack of international support and the severe chance of destruction, Ben Gurion advised his cabinet to vote in favor of independence. He understood this was a historical opportunity for Jewish Independence in the Land of Israel after 2,000 years, which may never be repeated. After a heated debate, most of the cabinet voted in favor of independence. The time and date set for the Declaration of Independence was Friday afternoon, 14th May 1948, before Shabbat came in and crucially just hours before the termination of the British Mandate for Palestine.

This historic decision to declare independence has been made, but where should the ceremony occur? It was impossible to hold it in the Jewish people's historical capital, Jerusalem, as it was under siege. So, the decision was made to hold the ceremony in Tel Aviv's art gallery on Rothschild Boulevard. The museum's main hall was below street level and had high windows, so it was relatively safe from attack.



Tammeus, B. (n.d.). [Title or description of the image]/[Photograph]. Bill Tammeus Blog
<https://billtammeus.typepad.com/.a/6a00d834515f9b69e201bb07ac737a970d-popup>

Hurriedly, chairs were borrowed from local cafes, and a sound system was borrowed from a nearby radio store called *Tzli*.



n.d.). *The recording of the Israel Declaration of Independence*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia.
 March 18, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Recording_of_the_Israel_Declaration_of_Independence

The day before the declaration, invitations were sent to a select list of leaders, who were told to keep the meeting's content secret. The demand for secrecy was not kept to as crowds of Tel Aviv residents packed the streets around the museum.



Gordis, D. (2017, May). *Why the American Jewish distancing from Israel is so heartbreaking*. Mosaic Magazine.
<https://mosaicmagazine.com/response/israel-zionism/2017/05/why-the-american-jewish-distancing-from-israel-is-so-heartbreaking/>

Crowds of people outside the Tel Aviv Museum during the Declaration of Independence ceremony.

מנהלת העם	
תל-אביב, ד' אייר תשי"ח 13.5.1948	
א. נ.,	
הננו מתכבדים לסלוח לך בזה הזמנה	
למושב	
הכרזת העצמאות	
שיתקיים ביום ו', ה' באייר תשי"ח (14.5.1948) בשעה 4 אחה"צ באולם המוזיאון (סדרות רוטשילד 16).	
אנו מבקשים לשמור בסוד את תוכן ההזמנה ואת מועד כינוס המועצה.	
המוזמנים מתבקשים לבוא לאולם בשעה 3.30.	
בכבוד רב	
המזכירות	

ההזמנה היא אישית - תלבשת: בגדי חג כהים	

People's Council

Tel Aviv 4th Iyar

13.5.1948

We are honored to send you this invitation to:

The meeting for the Declaration of Independence

That will take place on Friday, 5th Iyar (14.5.1948), at 4 p.m. in the museum hall (Rothschild Boulevard 16).

Please keep this invitation and the time and place of the council meeting secret.

Invitees are requested to arrive at the hall at 3.30 pm.

With much respect

The Secretariat

This invitation is personal - Dress code: Festive Clothes

The decision to declare Independence had been made. A venue had been selected, and dignitaries had been invited. The last and most historically significant task remaining was to compose the text that would bring the Jewish State into existence. David Ben Gurion and his cabinet came together to write the text that would be read as Israel's Declaration of Independence. The final text was not agreed upon in time for the official calligrapher to write out the text of the declaration. In the signing ceremony, the signatories signed a blank parchment that was eventually inscribed with the text of the declaration.

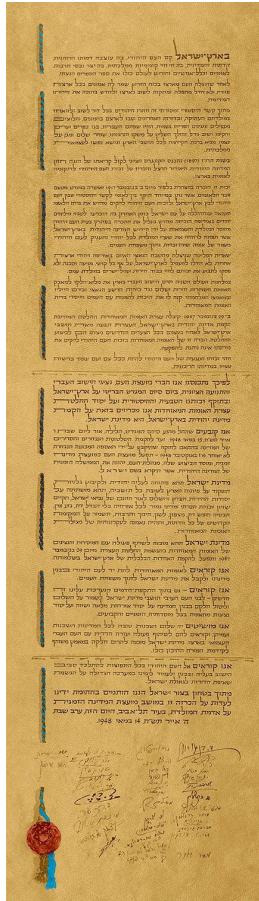


Koplow, M. J. (2021, July). *Did Israel's founders declare a secular state?* Mosaic Magazine.
<https://mosaicmagazine.com/observation/israel-zionism/2021/07/did-israels-founders-declare-a-secular-state/>

The Declaration of Independence is still considered Israel's most important constitutional text. It defines the character of the State of Israel as both a Jewish and Democratic State.

ACTIVITY

Read the text of the Declaration of Independence. Highlight the entire text in two different colors. Highlight every sentence or phrase that defines Israel as a Jewish State in one color and every sentence or phrase that defines Israel as a Democratic State in a different color.



ERETZ-ISRAEL [(Hebrew) - the Land of Israel] was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books.

After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith with it throughout their Dispersion and never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom.

Impelled by this historic and traditional attachment, Jews strove in every successive generation to re-establish themselves in their ancient homeland. In recent decades they returned in their masses. Pioneers, ma'pilim [(Hebrew) - immigrants coming to Eretz-Israel in defiance of restrictive legislation] and defenders, they made deserts bloom, revived the Hebrew language, built villages and towns, and created a thriving community controlling its own economy and culture, loving peace but knowing how to defend itself, bringing the blessings of progress to all the country's inhabitants, and aspiring towards independent nationhood.

In the year 5657 (1897), at the summons of the spiritual father of the Jewish State, Theodor Herzl, the First Zionist Congress convened and proclaimed the right of the Jewish people to national rebirth in its own country.

This right was recognized in the Balfour Declaration of the 2nd November, 1917, and re-affirmed in the Mandate of the League of Nations which, in particular, gave international sanction to the historic connection between the Jewish people and Eretz-Israel and to the right of the Jewish people to rebuild its National Home.

The catastrophe that recently befell the Jewish people - the massacre of millions of Jews in Europe - was another clear demonstration of the urgency of solving the problem of its homelessness by re-establishing in Eretz-Israel the Jewish State, which would open the gates of the homeland-wide to every Jew and confer upon the Jewish people the status of a fully privileged member of the comity of nations.

Survivors of the Nazi holocaust in Europe, as well as Jews from other parts of the world, continued to migrate to Eretz-Israel, undaunted by difficulties, restrictions, and dangers, and never ceased to assert their right to a life of dignity, freedom, and honest toil in their national homeland.

In the Second World War, the Jewish community of this country contributed its full share to the struggle of the freedom- and peace-loving nations against the forces of Nazi wickedness and, by the blood of its soldiers and its war effort, gained the right to be reckoned among the peoples who founded the United Nations.

On November 29, 1947, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution calling for the establishment of a Jewish State in Eretz-Israel. The General Assembly required the inhabitants of Eretz-Israel to take such steps as were necessary for the implementation of that resolution. This recognition by the United Nations of the right of the Jewish people to establish their State is irrevocable.

This right is the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign State.

"ACCORDINGLY, WE, MEMBERS OF THE PEOPLE'S COUNCIL, REPRESENTATIVES OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF ERETZ-ISRAEL AND OF THE ZIONIST MOVEMENT, ARE HERE ASSEMBLED ON THE DAY OF THE TERMINATION OF THE BRITISH MANDATE OVER ERETZ-ISRAEL AND, BY VIRTUE OF OUR NATURAL AND HISTORIC RIGHT AND ON THE STRENGTH OF THE RESOLUTION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, HEREBY DECLARE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A JEWISH STATE IN ERETZ-ISRAEL, TO BE KNOWN AS THE STATE OF ISRAEL.

WE DECLARE that, with effect from the moment of the termination of the Mandate being tonight, the eve of Sabbath, the 6th Iyar, 5708 (15th May, 1948), until the establishment of the elected, regular authorities of the State in accordance with the Constitution which shall be adopted by the Elected Constituent Assembly not later than the 1st October 1948, the People's Council shall act as a Provisional Council of State, and its executive organ, the People's Administration, shall be the Provisional Government of the Jewish State, to be called "Israel".

THE STATE OF ISRAEL will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice, and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

THE STATE OF ISRAEL is prepared to cooperate with the agencies and representatives of the United Nations in implementing the resolution of the General Assembly of the 29th November, 1947, and will take steps to bring about the economic union of the whole of Eretz-Israel.

WE APPEAL to the United Nations to assist the Jewish people in the building-up of its State and to receive the State of Israel into the comity of nations.

WE APPEAL - in the very midst of the onslaught launched against us now for months - to the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to preserve peace and participate in the upbuilding of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its provisional and permanent institutions.

WE EXTEND our hand to all neighboring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighborliness and appeal to them to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help with the sovereign Jewish people settled in its own land. The State of Israel is prepared to do its share in a common effort for the advancement of the entire Middle East.

WE APPEAL to the Jewish people throughout the Diaspora to rally round the Jews of Eretz-Israel in the tasks of immigration and upbuilding and to stand by them in the great struggle for the realization of the age-old dream - the redemption of Israel.

PLACING OUR TRUST IN THE "ROCK OF ISRAEL," WE AFFIX OUR SIGNATURES TO THIS PROCLAMATION AT THIS SESSION OF THE PROVISIONAL COUNCIL OF STATE, ON THE SOIL OF THE HOMELAND, IN THE CITY OF TEL-AVIV, ON THIS SABBATH EVE, THE 5TH DAY OF IYAR, 5708 (14TH MAY, 1948)."

FINAL DISCUSSION

Over the past few years, Israeli society has been discussing the nature of Israel as a Jewish and Democratic society. Below are some of the questions at the heart of these discussions. What are your opinions when asking these questions:

- Is there a contradiction between being a Jewish and a Democratic State?
- Which characteristics are more important for Israel, Jewish or Democratic?
- How can Israel be both the national home for the Jewish people and, at the same time, can we ensure total equality for all its citizens?

