Israel must uphold the law

Not even for one day since its birth some 63 years ago has the Jewish state known peace or normal bilateral relations with its neighbours. As a result, not surprisingly, Israeli governments have focused most of their policy attention on defence and foreign affairs.

For six decades, existential threats have commanded the agenda. The Israeli public has understood this and usually made allowances for the imperfections of a country beset on all sides by enemies. But some of those imperfections, through years of inattention and neglect, appear to have festered into deeper, sub-stratum societal wounds that threaten to wreak a different, but still destructive, havoc on the Jewish state.

One of the most pressing societal threats in Israel is the blatant disrespect for the rule of law that characterizes certain pockets of the population. Specifically, we refer to the extremist, aggressive, violent behaviour of some haredi and zealot nationalistic religious groups. To be sure, these groups constitute a very small, atypical sampling of the general population. But the danger to key, fundamental institutions of Israeli society is no less real for the small numbers of the thugs and disrespects of basic human rights.

One particular sector of the haredi community in Beit Shemesh has been the most recent example of the grossly abusive behaviour by the very few against the many, harassing, abusing and bullying women for reasons they justify by their narrow, myosogynist view of our religion. (See the related news story in this edition.)

Religious, nationalist zealots have recently attacked Arabs and Jews alike in the name of their vain, misguided attempt of “God’s will.” They even attacked an Israeli army base, injuring the base’s commander.

The government and the leaders of Israel must urgently turn their focus to these non-military threats to the Jewish state. Religious leaders who wield influence over the offending haredim and zealots must denounce the extremism that has increasingly become their followers’ trademark. The government must enforce and uphold the rule of law. It is gratifying that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said last week that he will act against “anyone who harasses women, anyone who harasses people in the public sphere.” He reiterated earlier comments: “While we will use all legal means at our disposal... this is not just a legal issue. It is also a social issue.”

The long-range, structural correction however, requires the larger mainstream political parties to amend a flawed electoral system that confers inordinately disproportionate political and thus financial power in the hands of small, single-issue, single-constituency, political parties, many of whose followers and loyalists feel empowered by their foothold in the electoral system to brazenly flout the law of the land.

The wider common good must finally trump narrow self-interest in the politics of the Jewish state.

25 years ago in The CJN

Canadian Jewish Congress criticized a Supreme Court of Canada ruling that upheld Ontario’s Sunday closing law, despite acknowledging it infringed on freedom of religion. CJG said the government failed to reflect the multicultural nature and penalized Saturday Sabbath observers, because they could only open Sundays with up to seven employees.

Says writer got the facts wrong

It seems that Harry Schachter, who wrote the article “Settlements an impediment to peace” (Dec. 8), is in need of an atlas, a history book and recent newspapers. Ever since Arabs were caught cutting down and damaging their olive trees in order to defame “settlers,” accusations that settlers have done these evil acts have lessened. Perhaps that’s why he is in need of relying on his data from the “impartial” United Nations. Gilo, which according to Schachter is in east Jerusalem, is actually in southern Jerusalem. He omits to say that the “Palestinian” application for admission as a state to the United Nations is a repudiation of every agreement signed by the Palestinian Authority. He omits to state that the Arab demand that Israel freeze settlement construction is a new demand, first raised by U.S. President Barack Obama, and that no such demand appears in any of the signed agreements between Israel and the PA. Moreover, he omits to write that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did freeze building for 10 months, but the Palestinians still did not return to the negotiating table.

He seems unaware that the Fourth Geneva Convention does not apply to Judea and Samaria and that, according to international law, valid to this day, Jews are allowed to settle in this area. More disturbing is his implication, he equates the killing of Arab terrorists with the murder of the Fogel family – three children and their parents – five of the eight settlers he feels were allowed to settle in this area. More disturbing is his implication, he equates the killing of Arab terrorists with the murder of the Fogel family – three children and their parents – five of the eight settlers he feels were allowed to settle in this area.

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LET THEM GO...

Ron Arad, Zachary Baumesel, Zvi Feldman, Guy Hever, Yehuda Katz

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Misleading headline

In the Dec. 8 issue, The CJN published an article with the headline “Last shul in downtown Ottawa sells building,” referring to Congregation Beth Shalom. However, the headline is misleading. It is not the last shul.

There is one more synagogue in downtown Ottawa – the Orthodox Ohev Yisroel, located at 516 Rideau St., only two blocks away from Congregation Beth Shalom. We wish to assure your readers that, just as our shul has hosted travellers, tourists and businesspeople from all over the world in the past, so, too, shall we continue to do so for many years to come. Shabbat hospitality is always offered to guests.

Heshel Teitelbaum
Ottawa

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Surgeon was a trailblazer

I was very happy to see my father, Herb Fitterman, mentioned in Sheldon Kirshner’s column “The passing parade,” (Dec. 22). My father was a man of accomplishment, a surgeon who performed the first implant operation in Canada despite huge opposition, a wonderful husband and father, a generous member of the community, an athlete who chafed at his body break-

The “academic” aspect of the paper “A Comparison of the Olive Oil Industries in Tuscany and Palestine,” presented at the recent olive-oil conference at St. Michael’s College at the University of Toronto, was rather tenuous (“Propaganda in an academic guise,” Dec. 8). There were no comparisons of the Palestinian example with relevant examples such as Israeli olive-oil production, Palestinians working inside Israel, etc. The speaker even admitted that “Tuscany” was basically an excuse to concentrate on Palestinians.

This is not the first attack against Israel I have witnessed in academic conferences, though usually the papers have had more academic merit. My own university union local has an entrenched anti-Israel policy that I am constantly trying to mitigate – not because I think there is nothing to criticize about Israel (or any other country), but because this attitude flies against academic principles and indeed the local’s own equality statement. There is no reason to tacitly or implicitly condone attacks on Israel – or any country or culture – just because these attacks claim immunity by masquerading as academic discourse.

Judith Cohen
Toronto

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Attack masquerades as academic discourse

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