

HOLIDAY MIRACLE IN NEW YORK: UN RECOGNISES YOM KIPPUR AS OFFICIAL HOLIDAY!

PRESS RELEASE

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In one of the last working days before Christmas, the United Nations has officially recognised the Jewish holiday *Yom Kippur* as an official UN holiday. For the first time in its 70-year history UN employees who observe Jewish faith will have the day off and there will be no official meetings on this day. The decision implements General Assembly resolution 69/250 which was adopted last year. The resolution adds *Yom Kippur*, Day of *Vesak*, *Diwali*, *Gurpurab*, Orthodox Christmas and Orthodox Good Friday in addition to Presidents' Day, to a floating holiday which the employees can choose for themselves. Christmas Day, Good Friday, *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha* have previously been recognised as official UN holidays.

The decision comes after two and a half years of active campaigning by the Israeli Permanent Mission to the UN and the European Coalition for Israel. The idea to have the UN recognise *Yom Kippur* as a holiday was first floated by ECI in a meeting with the Israeli government in the summer of 2013. On October 1, Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister **Zeev Elkin** presented the request to the Deputy Secretary-General of the UN **Jan Eliasson** in conjunction with the High level week of the 68th session of the UN General Assembly.

But it would take until May 12, 2014 before the Israeli Ambassador to the UN, **Ron Prosor**, presented an open letter to all UN member states, requesting their support for the initiative. The request was officially presented at a luncheon of the newly formed ECI initiative Forum for Cultural Diplomacy, which marked 65 years of Israeli membership of the UN.

Sixty-five (38 + 27 EU) UN member states have expressed their support for the request. The United States, in particular the US Ambassador to the UN, **Samantha Power**, played a crucial role in agreeing to make the American holiday, Presidents' day, a floating holiday which can be replaced by any of the new religious holidays. This way the initiative was prevented from being blocked by the anti-Israel majority of the UN. The other religious holidays which were given UN recognition alongside *Yom Kippur*, were part of a compromise agreement which helped secure the support of UN member states representing other major religions.

In meetings with the Israeli Ambassador to the UN, **Danny Danon**, and UN officials in New York on Friday, ECI Director for UN Affairs **Gregory Lafitte** and ECI Founding Director **Tomas Sandell** expressed their appreciation over the decision which is an important step for better inclusion of Israel and the Jewish people in the family of nations by respecting their most holy day in the calendar year.

The recognition was made possible thanks to the active support of senior UN officials, including the UN Secretary-General **Ban Ki-moon**, who on September 21 attended a special *Tashlikh* ceremony at the UN headquarters in preparation for *Yom Kippur*. The ceremony was hosted by the Israeli Permanent Mission to the UN and the Forum for Cultural Diplomacy.

— This decision shows that Israel has, in fact, many more friends at the UN than those who generally stand



with Israel in critical votes. By highlighting the universal values of the Jewish holidays we can bring nations closer to Israel as we, at the same time, strengthen the values of the UN charter, Lafitte said.

The European Coalition for Israel commended the Israeli Permanent Mission to the UN which has tirelessly worked to see the recognition become a reality.

— There could be no better way to commence the Christmas holidays than to celebrate the fact that after 70 years the UN will finally recognise *Yom Kippur* as an official UN holiday, Sandell concluded.



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