



VOTE MERCAZ

The Voice of the Conservative/Masorti Movement

January 21 - March 11, 2020

Elections for Delegates to 2020 World Zionist Congress

You Can Make a Difference

Let's Fight for Religious Pluralism

Theodor Herzl envisioned Israel as a homeland for all Jews. But today the government of that Jewish homeland only recognizes one stream of Judaism. The Masorti and other pluralistic movements are in an ongoing struggle for recognition. While progress has been made, there are still many challenges ahead.

As American Jews, we don't often get a chance to make a direct impact in Israel. However, the upcoming 2020 World Zionist Congress election gives us that opportunity. Every 5 years an election is held to determine the leadership of the World Zionist Organization, an important agency connected to a number of powerful and influential Jewish organizations where Diaspora Jews have a voice. It is imperative that the MERCAZ Slate – the official slate of the Conservative/Masorti Movement – has a strong showing in this upcoming election.

A vote for MERCAZ is more than just the opportunity to gain delegates to the World Zionist Congress – it is our best opportunity to send a strong message to the Israeli government and the people of Israel that we stand for an Israel that is democratic and pluralistic, that recognizes and empowers all streams of Jewish practice, and that guarantees the civil and political rights of all of its citizens.

Voting begins on January 21st and concludes on March 11th. You can Pledge to Vote right now by heading over to MERCAZ2020.org or by texting VOTE to 917-332-1162. We'll send you a reminder once the voting period opens as well as timely updates on the campaign.

If you want to make an even bigger impact get involved in the campaign effort! To volunteer contact votemercas@mercazusa.org.

Our Platform

Champions of Progress and Pluralism

MERCAZ USA is the Zionist Organization of the Conservative/Masorti Movement. A vote for MERCAZ is more than just the opportunity to gain delegates to the World Zionist Congress – it is the best opportunity to send a strong message to the Israeli government and people of Israel.

We support strengthening Israel as a Jewish, Zionist, and democratic state, and endeavor to shape it as an exemplary society with a unique moral and spiritual character rooted in the vision of the Hebrew prophets. We envision a society that is democratic and pluralistic, that recognizes and empowers all streams of Jewish practice, and that guarantees the civil and political rights of all of its citizens.

MERCAZ USA stands firmly for the following principles and goals:

- **An Open Pluralistic Jewish Society** - That celebrates Jewish values and embraces multiple streams of Judaism including the growth of Conservative/Masorti kehillot throughout Israel.
- **No Restrictions on the Law of Return** - MERCAZ opposes all attempts to restrict the Law of Return by redefining who is a Jew for the purposes of Aliyah.
- **Governmental Respect for Conservative and Egalitarian Traditions and Practices** – Including Israeli government recognition of life cycle events performed within all recognized streams of Judaism and implementation of the previously accepted agreement with regard to the Western Wall.
- **Increased Funding for the Conservative/Masorti Movement** – Increasing “stream funding” by the Jewish Agency, World Zionist Organization, and Keren Kayemeth LeYisrael to bolster Conservative/

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What is MERCAZ?

MERCAZ champions progress and pluralism in key agencies in Israel. MERCAZ is the Zionist organization of the Conservative/Masorti Movement and its official representative in the World Zionist Organization, formed in response to the Religious Affairs Ministry's disqualification of Conservative institutions from funding and recognition during the modern development of the State of Israel. MERCAZ focuses on bolstering pluralism, religious diversity, and democracy in Israel. MERCAZ USA is MERCAZ's United States affiliate organization.

MERCAZ represents the Conservative Movement in the World Zionist Organization, the Jewish Agency for Israel, the American Zionist Movement and the Jewish National Fund.

What is the World Zionist Organization?

The World Zionist Organization (WZO) was founded by Theodor Herzl at the first World Zionist Congress in August 1897 as part of his plan to create a national homeland for the Jews. Today, the World Zionist Organization determines the leadership of the Jewish National Fund in Israel (JNF) and runs 50% of the governing bodies of the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI). These include the agency's executive, budget committee, and all of its policy-making organs. The World Zionist Organization also has a number of member agencies including World Zionist Unions (affiliate branches of political parties), International Zionist agencies, and organizations that represent the three major denominations (Orthodox, Reform, Conservative) among others.

What is the World Zionist Congress?

The World Zionist Congress sets all the policies, including the financial policy, of the World Zionist Organization. Approximately every 5 years the World Zionist Congress elects delegates to determine the leadership of the World Zionist Organization. There are 525 total representatives in the Congress which are divided amongst different countries around the world. 200 representatives come from Israel, 152 from the United States and 173 from the rest of the Diaspora. It is imperative that MERCAZ receive as many votes as possible to put representatives of the Conservative Movement in the World Zionist Congress.

Why should I care about this election?

This election is our chance to publicly and prominently build a stronger Masorti Community in Israel, a chance we don't often get. It is also a chance to demonstrate to Israeli officials that Diaspora Jews care about religious pluralism.

The Masorti Movement has a lot to be proud of in the last decade: Conservative/Masorti rabbis have begun running Kabbalat Shabbat services at the egalitarian prayer section under Robinson's Arch; the Masorti education organization TALI has partnered with the Ministry of Education to enhance Israeli public school's curricula; 36 Ugandan Jews from the Conservative Abayudaya Community were welcomed to Israel on Birthright; and members of the Masorti movement have written the first ever egalitarian siddur for children with disabilities. These stories, and many others like them, are evidence of the fact that pluralistic Judaism is on the rise in Israel.

The Masorti Movement must fight for support from the Israeli government. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has still not ratified the 2016 Kotel agreement after freezing it in response to pressure from ultra-Orthodox communities. The government stopped short of their commitment to incorporate the Robinson's Arch egalitarian space into the Kotel plaza.

By preparing and running a campaign in your own community, you can directly impact the future of Conservative/Masorti Judaism in Israel. Your effort in joining Conservative/Masorti communities all over North America and Masorti communities around the world goes a long way. With so much at stake in this election, we need as many people involved as possible. The more effort you put into this campaign, the more of a difference you will make.

How does voting help increase funding for the Conservative/Masorti Movement?

A strong showing in the election can help us increase the Jewish Agency's "Stream Funding" to bolster the institutions of Masorti Judaism in Israel and to support the movement's programs that strengthen the bond between American Jews and Israel.

Programs such as the Schechter Institutes, TALI Schools, and Fuchsberg Center have been successful in promoting religious pluralism in Israel. Additional resources are needed to keep pace with the increasing demand for kehillot and Masorti programs around the country. Enhanced funding will help to provide crucial support for programs such as USY's Israel Pilgrimage, Camp Ramah's Israel Seminar, Schechter Day School Network Israel trips, JTS's Schocken Institute for Jewish Research and the United Synagogue's NATIV and Conservative Yeshiva that strengthen the connections between the American Jews and Israel.

Additional allocations from the WZO's Pluralism Unit are also needed to help build Masorti Olami communities in South America, Europe, Ukraine, and elsewhere around the world where Masorti Judaism is growing.

All About?

What does Masorti mean?

Translated Masorti means “traditional.” Basically, Masorti is Conservative Judaism outside of North America.

What Conservative/Masorti Movement Groups are represented on the MERCAZ slate?

American Jewish University/Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies	National Ramah Commission
Cantor’s Assembly	North American Association of Synagogue Executives (NAASE)
Federation of Jewish Men’s Club (FJMC)	Rabbinical Assembly
Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS)	Schechter Institutes
Masorti Foundation	United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ)
Jewish Educators Assembly (JEA)	Women’s League for Conservative Judaism (WLCJ)

How can I vote?

Beginning on January 21, 2020 you will be able to register and vote in the election online. You will be able to vote right from your phone or from a computer at any time. Once the election is open we will advertise the link that will connect you directly to voting. In the meantime if you want more details about what is involved, go on your web browser and navigate to MERCAZ2020.org.

If you prefer, you can vote by paper ballot. The ballots can be downloaded from the election website. There will be a link to the site from our site MERCAZ2020.org. You can print the ballot and fill it out, provide credit information or enclose a personal check and mail it to the address provided.

What does it mean to Pledge to Vote?

Because the election will not officially open for voting until January 21, we are encouraging MERCAZ supporters to ‘Pledge to Vote.’ This is a commitment that you will vote in the upcoming election and by giving us your information, we will be able to remind you when the system is open for polling.

You can Pledge to Vote in one of two ways:

- Text VOTE to 917-336-1162
- Go to MERCAZ2020.org and complete the Pledge Form on the home page.

Once you do this we will send regular updates on the campaign and ways to stay involved.

Who is eligible to vote?

To be eligible to vote in the US election, you must be a) Jewish b) at least 18 years of age by June 30, 2020 c) accept the Jerusalem Program d) reside permanently in the United States and e) did not vote in the September 2019 Israel Knesset election. **Finally you must pay the \$7.50 registration fee** which can be paid by credit card, electronic bank check (e-check), bank debit card or PayPal.

Does it cost money to vote and why?

There is a very small cost to voting in the election. It costs \$7.50 which covers basic administrative costs of the election.

How does the election work?

In America, the election includes a number of parties that represent the different major religious denominations and Zionist groups in the United States. For Conservative Judaism, the representative party is MERCAZ. Based on the election outcome, the 152 delegates allocated to the United States are divided among the parties running in the election.

For more information contact: votemercaz@mercazusa.org

Do I need to register in advance?

No, registration and voting are done at the same time, and begin on January 21, 2020. But please ‘Pledge to Vote’ by going to MERCAZ2020.org and fill out the form. We’ll remind you once it’s time to vote.



President's Message

Message from MERCAZ USA President,
Dr. Marilyn L Wind

Other articles in this newsletter have indicated to you how important it is for every one of you to vote in the upcoming World Zionist Congress elections. There is absolutely no question that this is of the utmost importance to the entire Conservative/Masorti Movement worldwide and I, too, encourage you to pledge to vote now and vote when the polls are open between January 21 and March 11, 2020.

However, I want to explain to you why in addition to voting, it is also important to join or renew your membership in MERCAZ USA if you have not already done so.

MERCAZ USA is a membership organization. We do not do fundraising. Your dues and voluntary donations are what enables MERCAZ USA to function. We receive no outside funds, yet we play a critical role in being at the table in a number of organizations.

MERCAZ USA, the Zionist arm of the Conservative Movement, is your voice in Israel, advocating for a pluralistic society that reflects our values as Conservative Jews. We represent Conservative Judaism within the World Zionist Organization, the Jewish Agency for Israel, and the Jewish National Fund (Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael). Our mission is to support religious pluralism in Israel and strengthen the connection between Israel and the Diaspora. We are the advocates and the force that guarantees funding for religious streams that is so crucial to our Movement's growth in Israel and around the world.

We also represent you at the American Zionist Movement (AZM), the coordinator of the World Zionist Congress elections, and we represent you on the Area Election Committee, which determines the rules for the election of American delegates to the World Zionist Congress. In order to run in the elections every 5 years, MERCAZ needs to be a member of the AZM. Membership in AZM is expensive.

MERCAZ USA is the only arm of the Conservative/Masorti Movement which any American Conservative/Masorti Jew can join. Our membership and leadership encompasses all arms of the Movement. We are proud to work in cooperation with the entire Movement in the US, Israel and worldwide.

Our Movement needs you to **join MERCAZ and vote!**
Marilyn

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Masorti kehillot, institutions and programs in Israel and throughout the world.

- **Strengthening the Ties Between American Jews and Israel** – Cultivating programs that connect American Jews and Israel and promoting Aliyah.
- **Combatting Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism** – A pro-active agenda to combat anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism in the United States and around the world.
- **Achieving Peace** – A negotiated peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians.
- **Supporting Israel as a Democratic Ally and Engaged Global Citizen** – As it lends its technology, innovations and assistance in the effort to solve global challenges.

For more information about MERCAZ USA and a more detailed version of the platform please go to Mercaz2020.org

You can join or renew your membership, \$54 for a Family Membership; \$36 for an Individual; \$18 for a Student at: mercazusa.org/support-us/membership



Join MERCAZ Today.

Please complete this form and return to:

MERCAZ USA 520 Eighth Avenue, 4th Floor, New York, NY 10018

or enroll online at <https://www.mercazusa.org/support-us/membership/>



Please print!

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Spouse's Name

Permanent Address

City State Zip

Email

Congregation

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I am enclosing my membership dues with this form.

Please charge my membership to my:

Visa Mastercard Amex

Account #: | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

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