**REFORMING ISRAEL’S APPROACH TO THE HAREDI MAMLACHTI EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

Today, there is a growing understanding and consensus of the need to fundamentally shift the relationship between the Haredi society and the state of Israel.

We believe that reforming the Haredi educational system can be a driver of such a change. The current Haredi education system intentionally lacks basic skills, knowledge and democratic values and offers its graduates little option to join the general Israeli workforce. It is expected that the Haredi education will constitute a third of the entire Israeli population in ~20 years.

In 2013-14, the Mamlachti (state-run) Haredi education system (MMH) was established, offering an alternative to independent and private Haredi education schools. MMH schools integrate core studies while preserving the Haredi cultural and halakhic needs. However, due to the Haredi political parties who oppose the MMH, only 60 elementary and high schools and 200 preschools opened in the past 5 years, despite ongoing requests from different groups of Haredi parents to open more MMH schools across the country. Approximately 3% of Haredi society are in the MMH system. One of the main barriers to opening an MMH school is the need for the local mayor's signed approval. The mayors of most cities avoid approving this due to the opposition of the Haredi political parties and the fear of them halting their progression to national politics.

COVID amplified the autonomy of the Haredi lifestyle in general and the education system specifically, and the threat this autonomy serves to the resilience of the state of Israel.

We are currently at an opportune moment in Israel’s political and social development, for a few reasons: the new government was formed as a wide and inclusive coalition which for the first time in years has no Haredi parties that traditionally oppose the MMH; that same government is committed to advancing core studies in Haredi education; the shock waves that the Corona crisis sent through the Haredi communities in Israel will certainly re-shape some of the internal dynamics vis a vis the Haredi leadership.

We believe that expanding the MMH education system and increasing the number of Haredi children studying in such schools can be a gamechanger. The threat to expel children due to not obeying the rules dictated by the Haredi leadership is impossible in a government-regulated system. Offering parents the option to send their kids to an MMH will release the Haredi leadership's hold on the community and increase critical thinking among the Haredi population. Additionally, more Haredi children in the MMH system means a higher percentage of Haredi children studying math and English at a high level which will impact the number of Haredi people who decide to join the workforce. This too will have an impact on the Haredi population in three levels. The first is Haredi men and women choosing to join the general workforce and integrate deeper into the general society. The second is a growing number of Haredi households choosing to leave the poverty cycle thereby cutting the financial dependence on the Haredi leadership. The third is a heightened Israeli identity among the Haredi population and a deeper connection between the Haredi population and the state of Israel.

MK Dr. Moshe (Kinley) Tur Paz was very active in establishing the MMH school system in his role as head of the Jerusalem Department of Education. Tur Paz has taken the MMH challenge as one of his key objectives for his current term as MK for the Yesh Atid party. His goal is to secure government funding and political support to increase the MMH system form 3% of the Haredi society to 30% within a decade. He plans on doing so through a government and philanthropic partnership that will jointly work together to lay the foundation and governmental infrastructure to anchor the MMH stream, pass a government decision on a budgeted multi-year plan for building new schools, allocating adequate resources, quality training and dedicated supervision standards.

**Meeting attendees:**

Dr. Moshe (Kinley) Tur Paz is a Knesset Member from the Yesh Atid party. Prior to joining politics, he served as the head of the Jerusalem Department of Education under Mayor Nir Barkat and was active in the field of religious pluralism as the chairman of Ne'emanei Torah Ve'Avodah.

Adi Bielawsky heads Jerusalem's Haredi Mamlachti Education department since September 2021. Prior to this she led the secular and religious Zionist elementary schools department with over 90 schools and 27k students.