

The Honorable Antony Blinken U.S. Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

August 17, 2022

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We write to you as 34 Jewish organizations along with 316 American Jews and individuals concerned about human rights, including 80 rabbis and cantors, from 33 states and the District of Columbia, to express our solidarity with the Rohingya people. It has been five years since the Burmese military waged a genocidal campaign that resulted in mass displacement, death, sexual violence, and other atrocities. This campaign also marked a severe escalation in Burmese state-sanctioned atrocities targeting ethnic and religious minorities in the country, which continue to this day, including the July executions of democracy activists after closed prosecutions that made a mockery of the judicial system.

Following the February 2021 military coup in Burma – led by the same military that perpetrated such heinous crimes just a few years prior – international support for the Rohingya people and other ethnic and religious minorities, along with accountability for the Burmese military, are both more important than ever. We were pleased to see you announce that the United States has formally designated the crimes committed against the Rohingya people as a genocide. It is critical to use accurate language in the face of such devastating human rights abuses, so recognizing these atrocities as a genocide is a step towards justice and accountability for the Rohingya people.

However, this designation alone is not enough. Jewish history teaches us that by the time a genocide has been recognized, it is too late: the international community has already failed.

For the Rohingya people, we cannot undo the trauma they have already collectively faced, but we can act swiftly and decisively now to support their demands for justice and accountability. The Torah offers the guiding phrase "Tzedek, Tzedek tirdof," or "Justice, justice you shall pursue." We are instructed to actively seek justice where it is needed, so much so that the word "Tzedek" meaning "justice" is repeated twice for emphasis.

We implore you to listen to Rohingya activists and leaders in Burma, Bangladesh, and the diaspora. We reiterate and fully support their calls for justice:

1) The U.S. must exert real pressure on the junta in Burma by increasing high-level sanctions.

This year we have seen what the U.S. can do through diplomacy when the sovereignty of a country is violated. While the U.S. initially responded to the usurpation of civilian government by the Burmese

military with targeted sanctions, it has continually left the largest source of income for the junta, Burma's oil and gas sector, on the table. The U.S. should follow the footsteps of the European Union by increasing sanctions on high level targets including the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE).

Without a significant increase in pressure on the junta, the U.S. risks perpetuating impunity for a military government that committed cycles of violence, including the genocide of the Rohingya people, and is now launching mass campaigns of violence throughout Burma.

2) The U.S. should show that American policy on all issues related to the Rohingya is led by the Rohingya community's priorities.

Rohingya people have continued to voice their concerns about the continually deteriorating quality of life in the refugee camps in Bangladesh. In the last year alone, the government of Bangladesh has imposed severe restrictions on Rohingya refugees in the camps, including the shuttering of shops and community-based schools, and a tightening of movement within the camps. The U.S., along with other donor countries, must press the government of Bangladesh to substantially improve conditions for Rohingya refugees, including allowing freedom of movement, and access to jobs and education. Recognizing the serious concerns regarding the relocation of Rohingya refugees to the remote and storm-prone silt island of Bhasan Char, we implore the U.S. to set clear expectations with the government of Bangladesh and the United Nations (UN) before any future relocations take place. This includes a UN assessment of the island; comprehensive monitoring to ensure voluntariness and informed consent of all relocations; a commitment to freedom of movement for refugees; and access to protections, services, health care, education and livelihoods.

Further, we call on the U.S. to work to ensure that the Rohingya people have an equal seat at the table when decisions are being made about their future. The government of Bangladesh, all refugee host nations and UN agencies should ensure they are actively and regularly consulting refugee representatives in the development of new policies affecting Rohingya refugees and humanitarian response frameworks.

3) The U.S. should take further measures to pursue justice for survivors and accountability for perpetrators of the genocide of the Rohingya people, and to address the ongoing risk of genocide that the Rohingya and other ethnic and religious communities face in Burma.

Your March 21, 2022 declaration that the crimes committed against the Rohingya people constituted genocide and crimes against humanity was an important step toward securing accountability for victims and survivors of these crimes. As a party to UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the U.S. has an obligation to do all it can to further support the Rohingya in their pursuit of justice.

We appreciate the Administration's commitment of an additional \$1 million to support the UN's International Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, and its provision of information to The Gambia to aid its case against Burma under the Genocide Convention at the International Court of Justice. We urge the U.S. to continue to support international justice mechanisms and resolutions at the UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly on Burma and to take further action at the UN Security Council, including referring the situation in Burma to the International Criminal Court. These efforts will not only help bring accountability for the genocide that has occurred but will also ensure that human rights violations that the Rohingya people continue to experience in Burma remain the subject of international concern and action.

Thank you for your attention to this crucial human rights issue. The American Jewish community and our allies are committed to supporting the Rohingya people as they fight for a just and peaceful future. We look forward to making progress together on these crucial objectives.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned 34 Organizations of the Jewish Rohingya Justice Network

American Jewish Committee

Anti-Defamation League

Association of Rabbis and Cantors

Cantors Assembly

Central Conference of American Rabbis Foundation for Ethnic Understanding

Hebrew College

HIAS

Indianapolis Jewish Community Relations Council Jewish Community Relations Council of Atlanta Jewish Community Relations Council of New York Jewish Community Relations Council/American Jewish

Committee - Detroit

Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Jewish Democratic Council of America

Jewish Labor Committee Jewish World Watch

L'chaim! Jews Against the Death Penalty

Mitzvah Matzos

Never Again Coalition

Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for

Holocaust Education Rabbinical Assembly Reconstructing Judaism

Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Society for Humanistic Judaism

T'ruah

The Board of Rabbis of Greater Rhode Island The Muslim-Jewish Solidarity Committee

The New York Board of Rabbis

The Orthodox Union
The Shalom Center

The Union for Reform Judaism

Torat Chayim Uri L'Tzedek

The Undersigned 316 Concerned Individuals

Susan AbramsWest Linn, Oregon

Nancy Abramson

Guilford, Connecticut

Bentley AddisonBaltimore, Maryland

Dr. Stanley I. Adelman

Austin, Texas **Seth Adler**

Coral Springs, Florida

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CC:

The Honorable Samantha Power, Administrator for the U.S. Agency for International Development

Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations

Under Secretary Victoria Nuland, Under Secretary for Political Affairs

Under Secretary Uzra Zeya, Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights

Counselor Derek H. Chollet, Office of the Counselor of the U.S. Department of State

Ambassador Daniel Kritenbrink, Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs

Ambassador Julieta Valls Noyes, Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration

Ambassador Thomas Laszlo Vajda, U.S. Ambassador to Burma

Ambassador Peter Haas, U.S. Ambassador to the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Ambassador Rashad Hussain, Office of International Religious Freedom

Ambassador Beth Van Schaack, Office of Global Criminal Justice

Special Representative Desirée Cormier Smith, Special Representative for Racial Equity and Justice

Jeffrey Agron

Social Justice Program Director, Religious Action

Center of Reform Judaism

Miami, Florida

Cantor Sheri Allen

Cantors Assembly

Fort Worth, Texas

Frances Alpert

Highland Park, Illinois

Dr. Roberta Apfel

Boston, Massachusetts

Matan Arad-Neeman

Brooklyn, New York

Sherry Archer

Portland, Oregon

Nikhil Aziz

New York, New York

Susan Mary Babbitt

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Ioana Baczo

Orange, Connecticut

Rabbi Dr. Chava Bahle

Executive Director, Or Tzafon

Suttons Bay, Michigan

Rikki Baker Keusch

New York. New York

Evelyn J. Banko

Lake Oswego, Oregon

Cantor David Barash

Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Rabbi Benjamin Barnett

Havurah Shalom

Portland, Oregon

Rabbi Eliot J. Baskin

Greenwood Village, Colorado

Dr. Susan Bassow

Littleton, Colorado

Rabbi Renee Bauer

Vice President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical

Association

Madison, Wisconsin

Rabbi Shelley Kovar Becker

New York, New York

David Beer

Washington, District of Columbia

Joel Beinin

Donald J. McLachlan Professor of History, Emeritus,

Stanford University

Portland, Oregon

Michael Berkowitz

Political and Policy Manager, Jewish Democratic

Council of America

Washington, District of Columbia

Philip Berkowitz

Potomac, Maryland

Rabbi Leah R. Berkowitz

Congregation Kol Ami

Elkins Park, Pennsylvania

Cantor Jennifer Bern-Vogel

Congregation Emanu El

Redlands, California

Rabbi Aryeh Bernstein

Chicago, Illinois

Rabbi Binyamin Biber

President, Association of Humanistic Rabbis

Silver Spring, Maryland

Rebecca Biggs

Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust

Education

Portland, Oregon

Rabbi Barry H. Block

Little Rock, Arkansas

Margo Bloom

Maplewood, New Jersey

Zoe Bloomfield

Princeton, New Jersey

Orion Bloomfield

Providence, Rhode Island

Andrew Blossom

Maplewood, New Jersey

Michele Bohana

Director, Institute for Asian Democracy

Washington, District of Columbia

Rabbi Jill Borodin

Congregation Beth Shalom

Seattle, Washington

Lily Brent

Atlanta, Georgia

Rabbi Deborah Ruth Bronstein

Boulder, Colorado

Wendy Busch

Portland, Oregon

Paula Bushkoff

Princeton, New Jersey

Rabbi Kenneth Carr

Easton, Massachusetts

Rabbi Adam Chalom

Dean - North America, International Institute for

Secular Humanistic Judaism

Farmington Hills, Michigan

Stacie Charlebois

Sebastopol, California

Barbara Cohen

President, Congregation Leyv Ha-Ir ~ Heart of the City

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Abby Cohen

Congregation Dorshei Tzedek

Newton, Massachusetts

Eva R. Cohen

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Shelly F. Cohen

Seattle, Washington

Liz Cohen

Princeton, New Jersey

Steven Collado

South Richmond Hill, New York

Justin Coskey

New York, New York

Jeremy Costin

Washington, District of Columbia

Matthew Craig

Director of Operations and Scheduling, Jewish

Democratic Council of America

Covington, Kentucky

Sam Crystal

Spokesperson, Jewish Democratic Council of America

Washington, District of Columbia

Deborah A. Cushman

Dedham, Massachusetts

Shayne Cytrynbaum

Livingston, New Jersey

Rabbi Faith Joy Dantowitz

Cupertino, California

Tanyanika Davis

New York, New York

James Dawson

Davis, California

Nancy Dawson

Portland, Oregon

Bennett Decker

Elkins Park, Pennsylvania

Arthur Dorman

Or Emet - Minnesota Congregation for Humanistic

Judaism

West Saint Paul, Minnesota

Samuel Dorow

New York City, New York

Mil Dranoff

Development Director, Jewish Democratic Council of

America

West Orange, New Jersey

Rabbi Matthew Dreffin

Birmingham, Alabama

Evan Drukker-Schardl

Somerville. Massachusetts

Anna Dubey

College Fellow, Jewish Youth Climate Movement

New York, New York

Betty Ann Duggan

Princeton, New Jersey

Shoshana Dweck

Armonk, New York

Hector Echevarria

New York, New York

Ruth E. Edelman

Potomac, Maryland

Brent Efron

Princeton, New Jersey

Rabbi Denise L. Eger

Congregation Kol Ami

West Hollywood, California

Michele Eiger

Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Bradenton, Florida

Professor Emerita Irene Elkn

Evanston, Illinois

Jayme Epstein

Washington, District of Columbia

Dr. Karen M. Erde

Portland, Oregon

Dan Esposito

Manhattan Beach, California

Kassie Evans Halpin

Portland, Oregon

Hannah Fajer

Washington, District of Columbia

Ellie Fajer

Littleton, Colorado

Dr. Eric D. Fajer

Littleton, Colorado

Ruby Fajer

New York, New York

Rabbi Susan Falk

New York, New York

Bill Farver

Portland, Oregon

Sophie Feintuch

Brooklyn, New York

Rabbi Marla J. Feldman

Executive Director, Women of Reform Judaism

New York. New York

Martin Feuerstein-Mendik

New York, New York

Maureen Flaherman

San Francisco, California

Emily Franco

Providence, Rhode Island

Rabbi Eli Freedman

Congregation Rodeph Shalom

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Joshua Fried

Brooklyn, New York

Susan Friedberg Kalson

Chair, Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Arlene Fromer

Portland, Oregon

Rachel Furey

Atlanta, Georgia

Ruby Fajer

New York, New York

Rabbi Susan Falk

New York, New York

Bill Farver

Portland, Oregon

Sophie Feintuch

Brooklyn, New York

Rabbi Marla J. Feldman

Executive Director, Women of Reform Judaism

New York, New York

Martin Feuerstein-Mendik

New York, New York

Maureen Flaherman

San Francisco, California

Emily Franco

Providence, Rhode Island

Rabbi Eli Freedman

Congregation Rodeph Shalom

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Joshua Fried

Brooklyn, New York

Susan Friedberg Kalson

Chair, Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Arlene Fromer

Portland, Oregon

Rachel Furey

Atlanta, Georgia

Faith Galderisi

Portland, Oregon

Mike Galos

Bellevue, Washington

Miriam Gammerman

Miami, Florida

Rabbi Daniel N. Geffen

Temple Adas Israel

Sag Harbor, New York

Benjamin P. Gellman

New York, New York

Cantor Edwin Getber

Pikesville, Maryland

Brady Gill

Executive Director, Jewish Youth for Community Justice

Piedmont, California

Andrea Gillespie

Washington, District of Columbia

Rabbi Rachel Goldenberg

Founder, Malkhut Queens Jackson Heights, New York

Helen A. Goldenberg

Tamarac. Florida

Liza Goldstone

New York, New York

Paul Golin

Executive Director, Society for Humanistic Judaism

Farmington Hills, Michigan

Cantor Lauren Goodlev

Beth David Reform Congregation

Gladwyne, Pennsylvania

Sarah Gorbatov

College Fellow, Jewish Youth Climate Movement

Durham, North Carolina

Kathryn Gordon

Portland, Oregon

Yona Gorelick

Baltimore, Maryland

Allen Gorrelick

Boynton Beach, Florida

Rabbi Pamela Jay Gottfried

Atlanta, Georgia

Cantor Michele Gray-Schaffer

Congregation B'nai Abraham

Butler, Pennsylvania

Sarah Green

New York, New York

Neely A. Grobani

Brooklyn, New York

Mali Gruber

Development Associate, Bend the Arc

New York, New York

Shayna Han

Washington, District of Columbia

Jeane Harris

West Chester, Pennsylvania

Rabbi Alan Henkin

Palmdale, California

Rabbi Lizzi Heydemann

Mishkan Chicago

Chicago, Illinois

Rabbi Moshe Heyn

Coastside Jewish Community

Half Moon Bay, California

Adina Hirschmann

Bergenfield, New Jersey

Marie Hobart

Worcester, Massachusetts

Rosalind Holtzman

Elkins Park, Pennsylvania

Dan Hornaday

Lansing, Michigan

Margot Horwitz

Wynnewood, Pennsylvania

Phil Houston Goldsmith

Portland, Oregon

r ortiaria, oregor

Barry Ingber

Medford, Massachusetts

Robbin Isaacson DeWeese

Portland, Oregon

Rich Iwasaki

Beaverton, Oregon

Rabbi Steven Jacobs

Central Conference of American Rabbis

Alameda, California

Lawrence Jacobson

Portland, Oregon

Ilene Jaroslaw

Brooklyn, New York

Lois Jordan

Tucson, Arizona

Rabbi David Kaiman

Gainesville, Florida

Rabbi Beth Kalisch

Beth David Reform Congregation

Gladwyne, Pennsylvania

Marcella Kanfer Rolnick

Brooklyn, New York

Leah Kaplan

White Plains, New York

Rabbi Henry Jay Karp

Davenport, Iowa

Jody Kashden

Sarasota, Florida

Sue Katz

Portland, Oregon

Perla Kaufman

Portland, Oregon

Raya Kazdan

Washington, District of Columbia

Kristen Kendrick

New York, New York

Janice Kettler

Portland, Oregon

Cantor Todd Kipnis

New York. New York

Dr. Donna Kirkwood

Little Rock, Arkansas

Idit Klein

President & CEO, Keshet

Boston, Massachusetts

Rabbi Michael Knopf

Richmond, Virginia

Diane Koosed

Ashland, Wisconsin

Samantha Kossin

New York, New York

Jay Kotowski

Hanover, Pennsylvania

Rori Kramer

Washington, District of Columbia

Geri Kramer

Washington, District of Columbia

Rabbi Barry Krieger

Greenland, New Hampshire

Julia Lager Mesulam

Portland, Oregon

Marc Landis

New York. New York

Beth Lange

Evanston, Illinois

Sara K. Laschever

Concord, Massachusetts

Evely Laser Shlensky

Santa Barbara, California

Rabbi Michael Adam Latz

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Liz Lavin Cohen

Union for Reform Judaism Commission on Social Action

Princeton, New Jersey

Melissa Lawrence

Blue Island, Illinois

Michael Leaser

Brooklyn, New York

Arieh Lebowitz

Executive Director, Jewish Labor Committee

New York, New York

Steven Lefkow

Stony Point, New York

Tim Lessick

Brooklyn, New York

Susanna Levin

New Rochelle, New York

Susan Levine

Silver Spring, Maryland

Samuel Lewis

Riverside, California

Cantor David A. Lipp

Immediate Past President, Cantors Assembly

Louisville, Kentucky

Kathryn Anne Liss

Chair, Social Justice Committee of Jewish Secular

Community of Asheville Asheville, North Carolina

Rabbi Emily Losben-Ostrov

Temple of Israel

Wilmington, North Carolina

Dr. Robert A. Lowe

Portland, Oregon

Michael Luckens

Watertown, Massachusetts

Cantor Abbe Lyons

Ithaca, New York

Denise Lytle

Woodbridge, New Jersey

Ryan Mace

Washington, District of Columbia

Allan Malkis

President of Or Emet, Minnesota Congregation for

Humanistic Judaism Saint Paul, Minnesota

Rabbi Bonnie Margulis

Executive Director, Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice

Madison, Wisconsin

Laura A. Martin

San Francisco. California

Stacy Mason

Palo Alto, California

Paula Mate

Oradell, New Jersey

Joshua Maxey

Washington, District of Columbia

Kelly McDermott

Portland, Oregon

Rabbi Batsheva Meiri

Congregation Beth HaTephila

Asheville. North Carolina

Julieta Mendez

New York, New York

Sebastian Mendez

New York, New York

Ruth W. Messinger

New York, New York

Adinah S. Miller

Portland, Oregon

Minda Miller

Columbia, South Carolina

Jill Minneman

Washington, District of Columbia

Joanne Moore

Virginia Beach, Virginia

Cantor Rebecca Moses

Temple Sharey Tefilo-Israel

South Orange, New Jersey

Tamara Nadel

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Deborah Nelson

Atlanta, Georgia

Ruth Neuwald Falcon

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Rabbi Geri Newburge

Wynnewood, Pennsylvania

Carol Tova Newman

Astoria, Oregon

Olivia Nightingale

Brooklyn, New York

Wai Wai Nu

Founder and Executive Director,

Women's Peace Network in Myanmar

Serena Oberstein

Jewish World Watch

Los Angeles, California

Aaron Ocken

New York, New York

Rabbi Suzanne Offit

Newton, Massachusetts

Rabbi Stacy Offner

Guilford, Connecticut

Katherine Olivera

Springfield, Virginia

Dr. Dale Oller

Portland, Oregon

Nick Opinsky

New York, New York

Dr. N. Ordover

Brooklyn, New York

Danielle Pafunda

Rochester. New York

Sharon Paltin

Laytonville, California

Rabbi Jack P. Paskoff

Congregation Shaarai Shomayim

Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Sagar Patel

Westborough, Massachusetts

Debby Pattiz

Board of Directors, Congregation Or Ami

Los Osos, California

Kirstie Pena

Jersey City, New Jersey

Janet Penn

Newton, Massachusetts

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner

Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Washington, District of Columbia

Elizabeth A. Peterson

Lincoln, Nebraska

Rabbi William Plevan

New York. New York

Rabbi Dr. J. Adele Plotkin

Beit Torah Congregation

Chino Valley, Arizona

Maya Pollack

Washington, District of Columbia

Deborah Popper

Portland, Oregon

Cantor Juval Porat

Congregation Beth Chayim Chadashim

Los Angeles, California

Rachel Powers

San Francisco, California

Eileen Prefontaine

Hopkinton, Massachusetts

Jo-Ann Price

Chester, Connecticut

Leah Pruente

Boston, Massachusetts

Dr. Sandy Ramirez

Portland, Oregon

Rabbi Mary Raskin

Portland, Oregon

Edward Reckford

Portland, Oregon

Rabbi Esther Reed

Highland Park, New Jersey

Nancy Reichman

Denver, Colorado

Shannon Reimers

New York. New York

Dr. Bill Resnick

West Hollywood, California

Adriana Reynoso

Portland, Oregon

Jane Rice

Portland, Oregon

Jay Rice

Novato, California

Rev. Raymond Ritari

Peralta, New Mexico

Kimberly Robins

Louisville, Kentucky

Dr. Marvin Rosen

Kol Shalom

Portland, Oregon

Elinor Rosenberg

Evanston, Illinois

Rabbi Jennie Rosenn

Founder & CEO, Dayenu New York, New York

Rabbi Ralph Ruebner

Skokie, Illinois

Robert J. Saferstein

Director of Programming and Strategy, Jewish

Democratic Council of America

New York, New York

Madrikha BJ Saul

Congregation Beth Adam, South Florida Center for

Humanistic Judaism Boca Raton, Florida

Rabbi Julie Saxe-Taller

Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Berkeley, California

Rivka Schafer

Co-Director, Jewish Youth Climate Movement

Teaneck, New Jersey

Suzanne Schecter New York, New York

Stanley Scheller

Denver, Colorado

Hon. Gail Schnitzer Eisenberg

Wilmette, Illinois

Lily Schorr

Durham, North Carolina

Cantor Anita Schubert

Temple Torat Emet

Boynton Beach, Florida

Sunny Schwartz

Boston, Massachusetts

Ouinn Sena

Arvada, Colorado

Alon Shalev

Vallejo, California

Clara Shapiro

Ridgefield, Connecticut

Rabbi Dean Shapiro

Tempe, Arizona

Steve Sheffey

Highland Park, Illinois

Karen Marie Sherman

Portland, Oregon

Denise Shiffman

Pleasanton, California

Cantor Harris Shore

Academy for Jewish Religion

Los Angeles, California

Rebecca Shore

New York, New York

Benjamin Silverstein

Washington, District of Columbia

Carol B. Singer

Advocacy Chair, Orange County Jewish Coalition for

Refugees

Laguna Niguel, California

Emily Sklar

Washington, District of Columbia

Yoni Slater

Evanston, Illinois

Edith M. Smith

Anaheim, California

Lanni Solochek

Nobleboro, Maine

Rabbi Jonathan Spira-Savett

Temple Beth Abraham

Nashua, New Hampshire

Kesha Spoor

Director of Philanthropy, Program Strategy, and

Communications, Coastal Roots Farm

Encinitas, California

Hannah Srajer

New Haven, Connecticut

Benjamin Stanislawski

Washington, District of Columbia

Diana L. Stauffer

Newcastle, California

Hazzan Jeremy Stein

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Harriet Steinberg

Lake Oswego, Oregon

Naomi Steinberg

HIAS

Washington, District of Columbia

Harriet Steinberg

Lake Oswego, Oregon

Rabbi Samuel Stern

Temple Beth Sholom

Topeka, Kansas

Judith C. Stern

Rye, New York

Richard Stern

New York, New York

Fillis W. Stober

Former President, Temple Sinai

Newington, Connecticut

Louis Stuhl

Bedford, Massachusetts

Kassandra Sturgess

Richland Hills, Texas

Javid Syed

New York. New York

Dr. Katherine Tallering

Chicago, Illinois

Rabbi David A. Teutsch

Reconstructing Judaism

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Joseph Timanovsky

Washington, District of Columbia

Laura Timme

New York, New York

Rabbi Shoshanah Tornberg

Old York Road Temple - Beth Am

Abington, Pennsylvania

Robert Trachtenberg

Portland, Oregon

Shari Turitz

New York, New York

Cantor Arlyne T. Unger

Cantors Assembly

Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania

Rabbi David Z. Vaisberg

Temple B'nai Abraham

Livingston, New Jersey

Rabbi Howard Voss-Altman

Temple Habonim

Barrington, Rhode Island

Dr. Mark Waltzer

Cherry Hill, New Jersey

Grady Warren

Kawrenceburg, Tennessee

Cantor Jeffrey Weber

Congregation Ahavath Sholom

Fort Worth, Texas

Rabbi Abi Weber

Temple Beth Zion-Beth Israel

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Rabbi Elyse Wechterman

Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association

Wyncote, Pennsylvania

Lee Weiler

Chatsworth, California

Rabbi Micah Weiss

Assistant Director, Thriving Communities of

Reconstructing Judaism

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Rabbi Zari M. Weiss

Seattle, Washington

Rabbi Sarah Weissman

Redwood City, California

Brooke Wirtschafter

Director of Community Organizing, IKAR

Los Angeles, California

Rabbi David Dine Wirtschafter

Temple Adath Israel

Lexington, Kentucky

Cathy Wolf

Middle Village, New York

Mallory Womble

Houston, Texas

Cantor Natalie Young

Temple Beth El

Aliso Viejo, California

Susie Zeiger

Florence, Massachusetts

Cantor Sarah Zemel

Temple Shalom

Aberdeen, New Jersey

Rabbi Shawn Israel Zevit

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Ruby Zimmerman

Washington, District of Columbia

Yehuda Zinberg

Teaneck, New Jersey

Cantor and Chaplain Michael J. Zoosman

Founder, L'chaim! Jews Against the Death Penalty

College Park, Maryland