

South Jersey Board of Rabbis and Cantors
Statement on Gaza, Israel and the Middle East
February 7, 2025

In response to recent proposals for the Gaza Strip from President Donald Trump, the South Jersey Board of Rabbis and Cantors issues the following statement:

We welcome creative thinking brought to intractable problems. We recognize that these proposals may have been meant to prod regional actors into more positive action. We are also aware that some aspects of the initial ideas from the February 4 Press Conference have already been clarified, walked back and put into a broader context which would make carrying them out less feasible.

Nevertheless, we believe that this proposal is at best a distraction, and, in its impact, is divisive and dangerous.

Even if this was meant to motivate new thinking, some are taking these ideas literally. Too many people embrace the idea of moving millions of Palestinians out of Gaza. However angry we may be with Hamas, whatever hurt and harm we feel, we believe that the very idea of such a transfer of population works *against* our shared goals – to bring hostages home, to end active fighting, and to remove Hamas as a governing power in Gaza.

If this was meant as a serious policy, we must speak out against it in a more direct way. We know how we react when anyone suggests that Jews do not belong in the place which we consider our homeland. Struggling against such claims has been a reality we have faced since the October 7 attack, and before that. We know what we expect from allies in other faith communities when such comments are made. Can we do anything less but denounce a similar suggestion when it is made, supposedly, on our behalf?

We may differ in our own opinions of Israeli conduct in this war. Yet we have strongly resisted false and exaggerated accusations against Israel. But what is proposed here is, in fact, ethnic cleansing – on a scale and of a kind Israel has *not* engaged in. Such action would be impractical, short-sighted, counter-productive and, above all, immoral.

This conflict is challenging, complicated, and painful. New approaches are needed. But this plan will not work. The conflict will not be solved by forcible displacement, nor by surrendering core commitments to human rights in exchange for the sheer assertion of power.

We urge parties in this conflict to work together for realistic, achievable and humane solutions. May the hostages all come home. And may no one feel threatened in their homes again.