Letter from Israel
And the children of Israel shall pitch their tents, every man by his own camp, and every man by his own standard. (Numbers 1:52)
The Land

Israel, land of the Bible and the historic homeland of the Jewish people, is situated in the Middle East, along the eastern coastline of the Mediterranean Sea, and forms part of a land bridge linking three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe. In this land, the Jewish people began to develop its distinctive religion and culture some 4,000 years ago, and here it has preserved an unbroken physical presence, for centuries as a sovereign state, at other times under foreign domination.

The total area of the State of Israel is 8,522.04 sq. miles (22,072 sq.km.), of which 8,356.40 sq. miles (21,643 sq. km.) is land area. Long and narrow in shape, the country is about 290 miles (470 km.) in length from north to south and some 85 miles (135 km.) across at its widest point between the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean coast. Israel is bordered by Lebanon in the north, Syria to the northeast, Jordan to the east, Egypt to the southwest and the Mediterranean Sea to the west.

Although small in size, Israel encompasses the varied topographical features and climates of a continent. In the north, the forested highlands of Galilee merge with fertile green valleys; sand dunes and farmland mark the coastal plain bordering the Mediterranean shoreline; the rocky peaks of the Samarian and Judean mountain ranges in the center of the country descend sharply to the semi-tropical Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth. Mountainous deserts, stretching southward through the Negev and Arava, end at the Gulf of Eilat, the northernmost tip of the Red Sea.

CLIMATE. The country’s temperate climate is characterized by much sunshine, with a rainy season from November to
April. Total annual precipitation ranges from about 20-30 inches (50-75 cm.) in the north to just over an inch (about 3 cm.) in the far south. Regional climatic conditions vary considerably: hot, humid summers and mild, wet winters in the coastal plain; dry, comfortably warm summers and moderately cold winters, with rain and occasional light snow, in the hill regions; hot, dry summers and pleasant winters in the Jordan Valley; and year-round, semi-arid conditions, with warm to hot days and cool nights, in the south.

WATER. The total annual renewable water resources amount to some 60 billion cubic feet (1.7 billion m³), of which about 65 percent is used for irrigation and the balance for urban and industrial purposes. The country’s water sources consist of the Jordan River, Lake Kinneret (the Sea of Galilee), and a few small river systems. Natural springs and underground water tables, tapped in controlled quantities to prevent depletion and salination, are also utilized. Since water is scarce in the region, intense efforts are made to maximize the use of what is available and to seek new prospective resources. In the 1960s, the country’s fresh water sources were joined in an integrated national grid, whose main artery, the National Water Carrier, brings water from the north and center of the country to the semi-arid south through a network of giant pipes, aqueducts, open canals, reservoirs, tunnels, dams and pumping stations. Ongoing projects for the utilization of new sources include cloud seeding, recycling sewage water and desalinating seawater.

FLORA AND FAUNA. The rich variety of Israel’s plant and animal life reflects its geographical location as well as its varied topography and climate. Over 500 kinds of birds, some 100 mammal and 90 reptile species, and nearly 3,000 plant types (150 of which are endemic to Israel) are found within its borders. Israel has become an internationally known bird-watching center and a focal point of international research and cooperation. Over 150 nature reserves and 65 national parks, encompassing nearly 400 square miles (about 1,000 sq. km), have been established throughout the country, with several hundred additional sites in the planning stage.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION. Rapid population growth and steady expansion of agriculture and industry have contributed to environmental deterioration, especially in the coastal area, where more than half of Israel’s population and most of its industry are concentrated. Plans and programs are in place to address pollution of the Mediterranean and Red Sea coastlines, groundwater pollution, water management, wastewater treatment, air quality, solid waste management, and hazardous substances. Enforcement of environmental legislation is a top priority alongside environmental education. Economic tools are increasingly used to promote environmental improvement, both in the form of financial grants to industries that invest in pollution prevention and in the form of taxes and levies on polluters. In line with the principles of sustainable development, efforts are directed at resource conservation and the prevention of pollution in all economic sectors.
INFRASTRUCTURE. Israel is connected to the world’s major commercial, financial and academic data networks and is fully integrated into international communications systems by means of underwater fiber-optic lines and satellite link-ups. The country ranks high, on a per capita basis, in telephone lines, computers, and Internet users. Israel is one of the first countries worldwide to have 100 percent digitalization of its telephone network, which enables the provision of a range of state-of-the-art services for subscribers. In addition, Israel has one of the world’s highest cellular phone penetration rates. Postal services operate throughout Israel and connect it with most countries abroad. In a country of short distances, cars, buses, and trucks are the main means of transportation. In recent years, both rail freight and passenger usage has increased. In Jerusalem, a light-rail urban system is under construction. The ancient ports of Jaffa (Yafo), Caesarea and Acre (Akko) have been replaced by three modern deepwater harbors at Haifa, Ashdod, and Eilat, which serve international shipping. Ben-Gurion International Airport is Israel’s main and largest air terminal.

BIBLICAL TIMES (c. 2000 BCE-538 BCE). Jewish history begins in the first half of the second millennium BCE with the patriarchs - Abraham, his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob. The Book of Genesis relates how Abraham was summoned to Canaan (later known as the Land of Israel) to bring about the formation of a people with belief in the One God. A famine which spread in the country forced Jacob and his sons, the forebears of the 12 tribes of Israel, to migrate to Egypt, where their descendants were enslaved. Several centuries later, Moses took his people out of Egypt, from bondage to freedom, and led them back to the Land of Israel. For 40 years they wandered through the Sinai desert, where they were welded into a nation and received the Torah (Five Books of Moses), including the Ten Commandments, which gave form and content to the monotheistic faith of their patriarchal ancestors.

Under the command of Joshua, the Israelite tribes reconquered the Land and settled it, uniting mainly in times of external threat under leaders known as judges. A monarchy was set up under Saul (c. 1020 BCE); his successor, King David, unified the tribes and made Jerusalem the country’s capital (c. 1000 BCE). David’s son, Solomon, developed the kingdom into a flourishing commercial power and built in Jerusalem the Temple to Israel’s One God. Archeological remains testify to important urban trading centers founded during his reign, including the fortified cities of Hatzor, Megiddo and Gezer. Upon Solomon’s death, the country was split into two kingdoms, Israel (capital: Samaria) and Judah (capital: Jerusalem), which existed side by side for the next two centuries, ruled by Jewish kings and exhorted by the prophets to social justice and observance of the Law.
The Kingdom of Israel was overrun by the Assyrians (722 BCE), and its people dispersed (the Ten Lost Tribes). Later, Judah was conquered by the Babylonians (586 BCE), who destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem and exiled the majority of the Jewish population to Babylonia.

PERIODS OF RENEWED JEWISH SELF-RULE (538 BCE-60 BCE). After the conquest of the Babylonian Empire by the Persians (538 BCE), many Jews returned to Judah, the Temple was rebuilt in Jerusalem and Jewish life in the Land was restored. For the next four centuries, the Jews were granted a large degree of autonomy under Persian and Hellenistic domination. When a series of measures were imposed by the Seleucid Syrians to suppress Jewish religious worship and practices, a revolt broke out (166 BCE) under the leadership of the Maccabees (Hasmoneans), resulting in the establishment of an independent Jewish kingdom under the Jewish kings of the Hasmonean dynasty, which lasted about 80 years.

UNDER FOREIGN RULE (60 BCE-1948). From 60 BCE onward, the country, weakened by civil strife, came increasingly under the domination of Rome. In an attempt to free themselves, the Jews launched a series of uprisings, which climaxed in the revolt of 66 CE. After four years of intermittent fighting, Rome subdued Judea (Judah), burning the Second Temple to the ground and exiling many of the country’s Jews (70 CE). The last stand against Rome, made by some 1,000 Jews in the mountaintop fortress of Masada, ended in 73 CE with the mass suicide of the defenders. It became a symbol of the Jewish people’s pursuit of freedom in its own land.

Another attempt to regain Jewish national sovereignty (Bar Kochba Revolt, 152 CE) resulted in the setting up of an independent enclave in Judea, with Jerusalem its capital. Three years later, however, the Romans defeated Bar Kochba and, in an effort to stamp out the Jewish connection to the Land, renamed Jerusalem ‘Aelia Capitolina’ and the country ‘Palaestina’.

Under Roman (70-313) and Byzantine (313-636) hegemony, the Jewish community in the Land continued to maintain and develop its own legal, educational and cultural institutions. Jewish laws, dealing with every aspect of life, were codified in the Mishna (2nd century) and elaborated in the Talmud (3rd-5th centuries). These laws, some of which were amended at later dates to meet changing conditions, are still binding on observant Jews today.

From the 7th century on, the country was ruled successively by Arabs (636-1091), Seljuks (1091-1099), Crusaders (1099-1291), Mamluks (1291-1516), Ottoman Turks (1517-1917) and the British (1918-1948). Frontiers underwent alterations, and the country’s name was changed according to the whim of the current ruler. Many edifices built by various conquerors still bear witness to their presence in the Land.

Though their number decreased during the centuries of foreign occupation, a continuous Jewish presence was maintained in the Land, reinforced from time to time by Jews returning to their ancestral homeland from the countries of dispersion, a trickle which began to gain momentum in the mid-19th century.

ZIONISM. The yearning to return one day to Zion, the traditional synonym for Jerusalem and the Land of Israel, has been the focus of Jewish life in the Diaspora for many centuries. By the end of the 19th century, Zionism arose as a national movement in response to continued oppression and persecution of Jews in Eastern Europe and growing disillusionment with the formal emancipation in Western Europe, which had neither put an end to discrimination nor resulted in the integration of Jews into the societies of the countries where they lived. At the First Zionist Congress (1897) convened by Theodor Herzl in Basel, Switzerland, the Zionist movement was constituted as a formal political organization calling for the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel and the revival of its national life in its ancestral homeland.

Inspired by Zionist ideology, thousands of Jews began to arrive in the Land, then a sparsely populated and neglected part of the Ottoman Empire. The early pioneers drained swamps, reclaimed wastelands, afforested bare hillsides, established industries and built towns and villages. Community institutions and services were set up, and the Hebrew language, long restricted to liturgy and literature, was revived as the language of daily use.

In recognition of “the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine (Land of Israel)” and “the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country,” the
League of Nations, which granted (1922) Great Britain a mandate over the Land, charged it, *inter alia*, with “placing the country under such political, administrative and economic conditions as will secure the establishment of the Jewish national home.”

In the same year, Britain set up the Arab Emirate of Transjordan (today the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan) in three quarters of the territory entrusted to it, leaving only the part west of the Jordan River for development of the Jewish national home. Extremist Arab leaders, opposing the establishment of the Jewish national home even in that small area, incited attacks against the Jewish community as well as against individual Arabs who advocated Arab-Jewish coexistence. Strict British restrictions on Jewish immigration and settlement did not appease the Arab militants, and outbreaks of violence continued until the start of World War II. At the end of the war, the immigration quotas for Jews were not rescinded, despite the immediate need to find refuge for the survivors of the Nazi Holocaust in which some six million European Jews, including 1.5 million children, had perished.

To circumvent Britain’s restrictive immigration policy, the Jewish community in the Land, together with world Jewry, mobilized its resources and organized a network of “illegal” immigration, known as Aliya Bet, which brought some 85,000 refugees from Europe to the Land.

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In the Declaration of the Establishment of the State, Israel extends its “hand to all neighboring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighborliness.” This appeal, reiterated by successive Israeli leaders, was persistently ignored or rejected. Arab terror attacks against Israel’s population centers continued, with the support and encouragement of the Arab states, which also instituted economic and diplomatic boycotts, blocked international waterways to Israeli shipping and instigated full-scale wars: in 1956 and 1967, Israel launched preemptive strikes in self-defense against major threats; in 1973, Israel repulsed simultaneous all-out attacks by the neighboring Arab states on two fronts.

The cycle of rejection was broken with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat’s arrival in Jerusalem (November 1977) at the invitation of Prime Minister Menachem Begin. The visit led to negotiations which resulted in the signing of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty (26 March 1979) and the formulation of the Camp David Accords, which included provisions for peace in the Middle East and a format for self-government for the Palestinians in Judea, Samaria and Gaza.

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Anne Frank and the house where she and her family were hidden from the Nazis for two years

Unable to reconcile mounting Arab opposition to Jews settling the Land with persistent Jewish demands to repeal the restrictions on Jewish immigration, Britain turned the issue over to the United Nations. The UN General Assembly voted (29 November 1947) for the establishment of two states in the area (west of the Jordan River), one Jewish and one Arab. The Jews accepted the partition plan; the Arabs rejected it.

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In 1982, Israel was forced to operate against the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) terrorist bases in southern Lebanon, from where attacks were being launched against the civilian population of northern Galilee. By the end of this operation, the Palestinian terrorist infrastructure in Lebanon was removed, but due to a security vacuum, Israel had to maintain a minimal military presence in the country.

Despite this, Israel’s peace efforts continued. On 30 October 1991, a multilateral Middle East peace conference was convened in Madrid, bringing together representatives of Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians. The formal proceedings were followed by bilateral negotiations between the parties and by multilateral talks addressing regional concerns.

A significant breakthrough was the Declaration of Principles (September 1993) signed by Israel and the PLO (as the representative of the Palestinian people), outlining arrangements for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Consequently, self-government was implemented in Gaza and Jericho (the Palestinian Authority, 1994) and, with the signing of the Interim Agreement (1995), was extended to additional areas in the West Bank.

Further rapprochement in the region was achieved when Israel and Jordan ended the 46-year-long state of war between them (July 1994), followed by a peace treaty (October 1994), which established full diplomatic relations between the two countries. The momentum in the peace process opened the way for expanding contacts and setting up relations with other Arab countries as well.

In January 1997 Israel and the PA signed the Hebron Protocol, and Israel redeployed in that area; in October 1998 they signed the Wye River Memorandum and phase one of the West Bank and Gaza redeployment was implemented by Israel. In September 1999, Israel and the PLO signed the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, after which Israel implemented further redeployments, released prisoners, opened the southern safe passage route and resumed Permanent Status talks.

Unfortunately, the next step, the Camp David Summit of July 2000 failed, due to the Palestinians’ refusal to accept Israel’s unprecedented proposals for solving the conflict. Instead, in September 2000, the Palestinians initiated a campaign of indiscriminate terror and violence, causing heavy loss of life and suffering to both sides. Hundreds of Israeli civilians were killed in terrorists shooting and suicide bombings. In reaction, Israel constructed an anti-terrorist fence, and managed to bring terrorism under control in most of the country.

Meanwhile, in the North, Israel maintained a gradually decreased security presence in Lebanon until May 2000, when the UN confirmed that the last Israel forces had been withdrawn to the international border. While Palestinian terrorism from Lebanon subsided, the Iranian-backed Hizbullah organization took its place. In July 2006, Israel was forced to respond to massive missile attacks on northern Israel as well as the kidnapping of two IDF soldiers, and reentered southern Lebanon in a military operation to counter the Hizbullah terrorism. This operation, later know as “The Second Lebanon War” lasted about a month, and was followed by a period of calm on Israel’s northern border.

Throughout this period, Israel continued in its quest for peace with its Palestinian neighbors. In 2003, Israel accepted the ‘Roadmap’ to peace, proposed by an international Quartet (US, EU, Russian and the UN), beginning with an end to Palestinian terrorism, to be followed by the final settlement of all issues and an end to the conflict.

In August 2005, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon implemented an initiative meant to advance peace, called the ‘Disengagement Plan’. In it, Israel withdrew all forces from the Gaza Strip and removed all the Jewish settlements there, as well as four Jewish communities in northern Samaria. Yet, despite Israel’s conciliatory move, Palestinian terrorism from the Gaza Strip continued and even escalated, especially after Hamas seized power there in 2007. In December 2008, after enduring an ongoing barrage of 12,000 rockets against its cities, and after having exhausted all other options, Israel launched a military operation against Hamas in Gaza aimed at stopping the bombardment.

Peace remains Israel’s primary goal. Its hopes for a negotiated peace settlement can be realized through reasonable historical compromises with its neighbors, in which the right of Israel to exist in security, as the homeland of the Jewish People, is recognized and respected.
The State

The DECLARATION OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL (14 May 1948) constitutes the nation’s credo, stipulating that “The State of Israel... will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants, irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the holy places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.”

The flag of the State of Israel is based on the design of the Jewish prayer shawl (tallit), with a blue Star of David (Magen David). The official emblem of the State of Israel is a seven-branched menorah (candelabrum), whose shape purportedly derives from the moriah, a plant known since antiquity. The olive branches on either side represent Israel’s yearning for peace. The national anthem is Hatikva (The Hope).

Israel is a parliamentary democracy, with legislative, executive and judicial branches operating on the principle of the separation of powers to ensure checks and balances within the system.

THE PRESIDENT, whose duties are largely ceremonial, symbolizes the unity of the state. Elected by the Knesset (Israel’s parliament) for one seven-year term, the president signs laws, pardons prisoners and commutes sentences upon recommendation of the Minister of Justice and accepts the credentials of foreign envoys.

THE KNESSET, the legislative body, is a 120-member, unicameral parliament. Knesset members, representing a wide range of political parties, are chosen in nationwide elections, held at least every four years. On Election Day, voters cast a ballot for a political party to represent them in the Knesset. The whole country constitutes a single electoral constituency. The number of seats assigned to each party in the Knesset is proportional to its share of the total national vote.

Elections are general, national, direct, equal, secret, and proportional. All citizens of Israel enjoy equal rights,
regardless of sex, religion or ethnic background. Every citizen is entitled to vote from age 18 and to be elected to office from age 21.

The Knesset operates in plenary sessions and through 15 standing committees. General debates and votes on legislative proposals submitted by the government or via private members’ bills, as well as on government policy and activity, take place in plenary sessions. To become law, a bill must pass three readings in the Knesset, after which the president, prime minister, Knesset speaker and minister responsible sign the bill into law. Knesset debates are conducted in Hebrew while Arab and Druze members may use Arabic (Israel’s other official language); simultaneous translation is available in both languages.

THE GOVERNMENT (the executive branch) is responsible to the Knesset and subject to its confidence. Its policy-making powers are very wide with respect to all major aspects of the country’s life. Following elections, the president selects a Knesset member with the responsibility of forming the government and presenting a list of ministers for Knesset approval; half of the ministers must be Knesset members. Most ministers are assigned a portfolio and head a ministry; others serve without portfolio but may be given responsibility for special projects. The prime minister may also serve as a minister with a portfolio.

All governments since 1948 have been based on a coalition of several parties as, to date, no single party has received over half of the 120 Knesset seats. The government serves for a period of four years, although its term may be shortened by the resignation, incapacitation or death of the prime minister or by a no-confidence vote in the Knesset.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT includes 73 municipalities and 124 local councils. Municipal and local councils are elected on the basis of proportional representation; mayors and heads of local councils are chosen by direct vote. The heads of 54 regional councils are selected from among the chairpersons of the committees of each community in the region or by direct vote.

THE JUDICIARY is entirely independent of the executive and the legislative branches. Judges are appointed by the president following the recommendation of a public nominations committee and they serve until their mandatory retirement at age 70. The judicial system consists of three levels of courts: magistrate’s courts, which deal with civil and minor criminal offenses; district courts, which deal with all criminal and civil cases not within the competence of lower courts; and the Supreme Court, with countrywide jurisdiction, serving as the highest court of appeal and sitting also as a High Court of Justice in petitions brought by persons seeking redress against a public authority. Special courts deal with specific matters such as traffic offenses, labor disputes, juvenile delinquency, small claims and the like. Jurisdiction over matters of personal status (marriage and divorce) is vested in the courts of the various religious communities.

LAW OF THE LAND. Upon attaining statehood, the body of law adopted consisted of statutes in force during the British Mandate period (1922-48), insofar as they were consistent with the provisions of the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel. Since then, new laws have been enacted and old ones revised to address current situations. Therefore, the prevailing characteristic of the legal system is the large body of independent Israeli statutory and case law enacted since 1948.

Citizens of all ethnic and religious backgrounds are guaranteed full democratic and human rights, ranging from freedom of speech, religion, universal suffrage and equality before the law. Freedom of the press, of political affiliation, of occupation and of strike and demonstration are embodied in Israel’s laws and traditions. Basic Laws, relating to all aspects of life and the functioning of the main institutions of the state, will eventually be brought together to form a constitution.

LAW ENFORCEMENT. In common with police forces around the world, the task of Israel’s police is to maintain the quality of life by fighting crime, assisting the authorities in carrying out the law, as well as providing guidance on preventive measures for the safety and protection of the public.

The head of the Israel Police is appointed by the government, with the recommendation of the Minister of Internal Affairs. The Israel Police is divided into six territorial districts, while the National Headquarters, located in Jerusalem, includes a professional staff to assist Israel Police units. The Border Police functions as a multipurpose police force dealing mainly with internal
security operations and assisting the regular police in combating crime. The Border Police also includes a special anti-terrorist unit.

THE ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES (IDF), founded in 1948, ranks among the most battle-tested armed forces in the world, having had to defend the country in six major wars. The IDF’s security objectives are to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Israel, deter its enemies and curb all forms of terrorism that threaten daily life. Given the country’s lack of territorial depth and the fact that the IDF is outnumbered by its enemies, the IDF’s doctrine at the strategic level is defensive, while its tactics are offensive.

The IDF’s main resource is the high caliber of its soldiers. To defend the country, the IDF deploys a small standing army, early warning capabilities and a regular air force and navy. All eligible men and women are drafted at age 18, men for three years and women for two years. The standing army is made up of these conscripts and career personnel. The majority of IDF soldiers are reservists, who, in time of war or crisis, are quickly mobilized into their units from all parts of the country.

Through the years, the IDF has also been responsive to the demands of the society at large, assuming a variety of social-national functions, and operating a wide range of projects which focus on the areas of greatest need at the time.

People

Founded as a Jewish state, Israel’s society, numbering over seven million people, forms a mosaic of different religions, cultures and social traditions. Citizenship is determined by birth, residence or naturalization; citizens wishing to hold dual nationality may do so.

Religious affiliation and practice is a matter of personal choice, with religious freedom guaranteed by the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel.

Today the country’s population is comprised of 75.5 percent Jews, 20.2 percent Arabs (mostly Muslim) and the remaining 4.3 percent Druze, Circassians, and others not classified by religion.

Within this pluralistic framework, the various communities maintain their own religious, educational, cultural and charitable institutions. The courts of each religious community have full jurisdiction in matters of the personal status of its members.

Each of the country’s many holy sites is administered by its own religious authority, while protection against desecration and trespassing as well as free access are guaranteed by law.

Israel’s official day of rest is Saturday, the Shabbat. Muslims observe their day of rest on Friday, while Christians observe theirs on Sunday.

Since the establishment of the state (1948), the Jewish population has grown from 650,000 to over seven million, doubling in the first four years alone with the mass immigration of European Holocaust survivors and refugees from Arab countries.

From that time, Jews have continued to come, in varying numbers, both from countries of oppression and from the free world. In two major efforts (1984, 1991) virtually the entire Jewish community of Ethiopia, believed to have been there since the time of King Solomon, was gathered to Israel. Another large wave of immigration, which began in 1989, is comprised of over one million Jews from the former Soviet Union.
In the course of the “ingathering of the exiles,” Jews brought with them the traditions of their own communities as well as aspects of the culture indigenous to the countries where they had lived for generations. Thus Israel’s Jewish population, while united by a common faith and history, is characterized by a diversity of outlooks and lifestyles, resulting in a society which is partly Western, partly Eastern European, partly Middle Eastern, but mainly Israeli.

Israel’s primarily Arab non-Jewish population, comprising about 24 percent of the population, has increased from 156,000 people in 1949 to some 1.8 million today. Their participation in the country's democratic processes attests to their civic affiliation, even though the development of relations between Israeli Arabs and Jews has been hindered by differences in language, religion and lifestyle as well as by the decades-long Arab-Israeli conflict.

The two populations live side by side, with contacts on economic, municipal and political levels, but with little social interaction.

Urban Life

About 92 percent of Israelis live in urban areas. Many modern towns and cities, blending the old and the new, are built on sites known since antiquity, among them Jerusalem, Safed, Be’er Sheva, Tiberias, and Akko. Others such as Rehovot, Hadera, Petach Tikva, and Rishon Lezion began as agricultural villages in the pre-state era and gradually evolved into major population centers. Development towns such as Karmiel and Kiryat Gat were built in the early years of the state to accommodate the rapid population growth generated by mass immigration, as well as to help distribute the population throughout the country and to promote a closely interlocked rural and urban economy by drawing industry and services to previously unpopulated areas.

Urban buildings are constructed mostly of stone, concrete block and stucco. They vary in style from the restored remnants of past centuries to dwellings built to accommodate the population in pre-state times; from neighborhood projects hastily erected to house the masses who arrived with the establishment of the state to residential, commercial and institutional buildings of recent decades, which show the effects of modern planning.

Most residential areas are separated from commercial and industrial zones, with extensive, well-tended parks and numerous playgrounds situated within the town limits.

Israel’s four main cities are Jerusalem the capital; Tel Aviv, focus of the country’s industrial, commercial, financial and cultural life, founded in 1909 as the first Jewish city in modern times; Haifa, a major Mediterranean port and the industrial center of northern Israel; and Be’er Sheva, the largest population center in the south.
JERUSALEM has stood at the center of the Jewish people’s national and spiritual life since King David made it the capital of his kingdom over 3,000 years ago. From the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple in 70 CE to the restoration of Jewish sovereignty in the Land with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the city was under the control of successive foreign powers; most left their imprint on it, but none made it their national capital.

Until the latter half of the 19th century, Jerusalem consisted of a walled city made up of four distinct quarters: Jewish, Muslim, Armenian and Christian. From about 1860 onwards, the growing Jewish population, which had maintained a virtually continuous presence in the city through the ages, became a majority and began to build new neighborhoods outside the wall, forming the nucleus of modern Jerusalem.

Under British rule (1918-1948), Jerusalem was transformed from a neglected, poverty-ridden provincial town of the Ottoman Empire into a flourishing city. During this period, many new neighborhoods were established, each reflecting the character of the particular ethnic group by or for whom it was built.

The armistice line drawn at the end of the 1948-49 War of Independence divided Jerusalem in two, with Jordan controlling the eastern section, including the Old City, and Israel the western sector, which became the country’s capital. For the next 19 years, concrete walls and barbed wire sealed off one half of the city from the other.

Reunited as the result of the 1967 Six-Day War, Jerusalem is today Israel’s largest city with a population of some 763,600. It is a city which looks simultaneously to its past and its future, by restoring ancient sites, improving infrastructure and building new neighborhoods; it is the capital of Israel, the location of the President’s residence, the Knesset (Israel’s parliament), the Supreme Court and government ministries; it is a city of diverse populations - Jews and Arabs, religiously observant and secular, Eastern and Western; it is a city where the arts flourish within a vibrant cultural life which is at once international in scope and uniquely Israeli.

Many places sacred to three major world religions are located in Jerusalem: the Western Wall, the last remnant of the Second Temple and a focus of prayer and source of inspiration for Jews in Israel and all over the world; the Dome of the Rock, marking the traditional site of the Prophet Muhammad’s ascent to heaven; the Al-Aqsa mosque, considered Islam’s third holiest place after Mecca and Medina; the Garden of Gethsemane, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Via Dolorosa and other Christian sites associated with the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, to name but a few. The almost two million visitors who crowd Jerusalem every year come to explore its well-maintained historical sites and holy places, and to enjoy aspects of its multi-ethnic, multi-cultural character.

TEL A VIV-YAFO, a modern city on the Mediterranean coast, is Israel’s commercial and financial center as well as the focus of its cultural life. Headquartered there are most industrial organizations, the stock exchange, major newspapers, commercial centers, and publishing houses.
Tel Aviv, the first all-Jewish city in modern times, was founded in 1909 as a suburb of Jaffa (Yafo), one of the oldest urban settlements in the world. In 1934 Tel Aviv was granted municipal status, and in 1950 it was renamed Tel Aviv-Yafo, the new municipality absorbing old Jaffa. The area around the ancient port of Jaffa has been developed into an artists’ colony and tourist center, with galleries, restaurants, and nightclubs. Tel Aviv’s “White City,” a vast ensemble of buildings from the 1930s-1950s in the Modernist Movement style, has been recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage site.

HAIFA, on the Mediterranean Sea, rises from the coastline over the slopes of Mount Carmel. It is built on three topographical levels: the lower city, partly on land recovered from the sea, is the commercial center with harbor facilities; the middle level is an older residential area; and the top level consists of rapidly expanding modern neighborhoods with tree-lined streets, parks, and pine woods overlooking the industrial zones and sandy beaches on the shore of the wide bay below. A major deep-water port, Haifa is a focus of international trade and commerce. It also serves as the administrative center of northern Israel.

BE’ER SHEVA, in the northern Negev, is located at the intersection of routes leading to the Dead Sea and Eilat. It is a new city built on an ancient site, dating back to the age of the Patriarchs some 3,500 years ago. Called the ‘Capital of the Negev,’ Be’er Sheva is an administrative and economic center, with regional government offices and institutions of health, education, and culture which serve all of southern Israel.

Rural Life

About 8 percent of the population lives in rural areas, making their home either in the kibbutz or moshav, forms of agricultural settlement which were developed during the early part of the 20th century, or in one of the country’s many villages.

The KIBBUTZ was established as a social and economic unit in which property and means of production are communally owned and decisions are made by the general assembly of its members. While demanding from its members responsibility and commitment to the community, the kibbutz provides them with their needs from infancy to old age.

Having come a long way from their pioneer beginnings when agriculture was their economic mainstay, kibbutzim are now diversifying their production branches, expanding into various kinds of industry and services. Although the kibbutzim constitute 1.7 percent of Israel’s population (in some 267 settlements), their share of the country’s production far exceeds this proportion, as they grow some 16 percent of farm produce and manufacture about 4 percent of industrial output (excluding diamonds). Tourist facilities, catering and factory outlet stores have recently become an important part of the kibbutz economy.

The kibbutz, which has distinguished itself with its contribution to the establishment and development of the state, is today seeking ways to meet the challenges of modern life in the technological age, while maintaining its original egalitarian framework. While these adjustments have necessitated far-reaching changes, it is believed that this ability to adapt and compromise is the key to its survival.

The MOSHAV is an agricultural village in which each family maintains its own farm and household. Originally, cooperation extended to purchasing, marketing and the provision of community services; today, moshav farmers have chosen to be more independent economically. 441 moshavim, averaging about 60 families each and
comprising some 3.4 percent of the country’s population, supply a large portion of the total farm produce.

ARAB AND DRUZE RURAL VILLAGES make up about 1.7 percent of Israel’s population. Houses and land are privately owned, and farmers cultivate and market their crops on an individual basis. In recent years, with the expansion of the villages and the increasing mechanization of agriculture, more people work either in local light industry or in nearby urban and rural centers.

About half of the country’s 170,000 Bedouin Arabs are no longer nomads and live in permanent settlements. Others follow their traditional way of life, although most stay in one location.

Moshav Nahalal

The YISHUV KEHILATI (COMMUNITY SETTLEMENT) is a new form of rural settlement, with the 107 existing communities ranging in size from several dozens to several hundreds of families. Although each family’s economic life is completely independent and most members work outside the community, the level of the members’ voluntary participation in community life is very high.

The central governing institution is the Members’ Assembly, where important issues and guiding principles are decided among the members by popular vote. The community’s budget is approved by the members at an annual meeting. Alongside management and oversight committees, a number of working groups deal with areas such as education, culture, youth, finances, religion and the like. A secretariat (sometimes paid, sometimes elected volunteers) runs the community’s day-to-day affairs. New members are accepted only with the approval of the community.

Health

Israel’s high standards of health services, top-quality medical resources and research, modern hospital facilities, and an impressive ratio of physicians and specialists to population are reflected in the country’s low infant mortality rate (4.7 per 1,000 live births) and long life expectancy (82.5 years for women, 78.8 for men). Health care for all, from infancy to old age, is ensured by law and the national expenditure on health compares favorably with that of other developed countries. Western-level training for medical professions is offered at the country’s schools of medicine, dentistry, pharmacology, nursing and physical rehabilitation.

The National Health Insurance Law (in effect since January 1995) provides a standardized basket of medical services, including hospitalization, for all residents of Israel. Health insurance premiums are collected by the National Insurance Institute which transfers the funds to the four health-care organizations providing the medical services.

The 50th anniversary of Magen David Adom.

“Whoever saves one life has saved an entire world”

Responsibility for all health services is vested in the Ministry of Health, which prepares legislation and oversees its implementation; controls medical standards throughout the country; licenses medical personnel; and supervises the planning and construction of hospitals. The ministry also acts as a public health agency with regard to environmental and preventive medicine.

Health services are offered at 375 general and specialized hospitals (with some 42,676 beds), as well as through a
network of outpatient clinics, mother-and-child health care centers, convalescent homes, rehabilitation institutes and school health programs, which include dental care. Medical facilities and services are provided by the Ministry of Health, the large municipalities, private and non-profit institutions and health insurance funds.

Emergency care is available through Magen David Adom (Red Shield of David), which corresponds to the Red Cross, or the Red Crescent, in other countries. It provides a public ambulance service, mobile intensive care units and emergency treatment at first-aid stations all over the country, and maintains a network of blood banks.

Israeli researchers have made impressive contributions in the fields of cancer immunology and cardiology, as well as in brain, orthopedic and plastic surgery and in the treatment of burns. Israel is also playing an important role in the development of medical technology, including computerized diagnostic and monitoring systems, pacemakers, lasers and other life-saving and pain-relieving devices.

Israel’s health problems are similar to those prevailing in the Western world. Health education programs are widely used to inform the public of the need to stop habits such as smoking and overeating, as well as lack of physical exercise, which have proved detrimental to health. Campaigns are also run frequently to increase workers’ and drivers’ awareness of potential dangers.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS. Environmental and health hazards have been generated by rapid population growth and steady expansion of agricultural and industrial activities. More than 70 percent of Israel’s industry is concentrated along the narrow coastal zone where meteorological conditions are unfavorable for the dispersal of pollutants. To combat pollution of the Mediterranean and Red Sea coastlines, Israel has adopted a multifaceted program of legislation, enforcement, beach and shore clean-up and international activities, primarily within the framework of the Mediterranean Action Plan. In addition to regulatory measures and education as essential components of its environmental policy, Israel now also offers financial grants to companies which invest in monitoring and pollution treatment facilities and in environment-friendly technologies and materials.

SHARING BEYOND BORDERS. In accordance with the belief that proper medical care is a universal right transcending barriers of ideology and political borders, Israel’s hospitals are open to all seeking their expertise. Over the years, patients have come for specialized treatment from all over the world, including countries with which Israel has no diplomatic relations.

In many parts of Asia and Africa, Israeli doctors and nurses are providing assistance in treating diseases which have been virtually eradicated in developed countries, and share their skills with local medical personnel on exchange programs, some held under the auspices of the World Health Organization. Israeli medical teams also participate in relief efforts in disaster areas.
Social Services

Aimed at enhancing the well-being of the population, with special concern for the weaker elements of the society, Israel has enacted a wide range of social legislation and set up extensive social assistance programs and community services throughout the country.

“...they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid...” (Micah 4:4)

Care of the elderly, assistance for single parents, programs for children and youth, adoption agencies, as well as prevention and treatment of alcoholism and drug abuse, comprise a large part of the services available to individuals and families. Correctional services encompass adult and juvenile probation frameworks, remedial programs for school dropouts, and residential and observational services for youth in distress. Sheltered workshops and employment counseling are among the rehabilitation services available for the physically disabled. Mentally retarded persons are cared for through various residential and community-based programs.

Care and services for the elderly have become a major component of Israel’s health and social service capabilities. While the total population has increased five-fold since the country’s establishment, the number of senior citizens (age 65+) has increased 10-fold, now representing nearly 10 percent of Israel’s over 7 million inhabitants. Much of this growth has been due to mass immigration. Over one million immigrants have arrived since 1989, more than 12 percent of them aged 65 and over.

Many of Israel’s elderly, some 13 percent of whom are disabled, are dependent upon family and community resources. Community-based services for senior citizens include assisting families caring for an aged person, senior citizens’ clubs, meals-on-wheels, sheltered housing, daycare, medical equipment and transportation.

Schools of social work in universities offer graduate and postgraduate training, combining theoretical study with fieldwork. Special courses for childcare workers and social service aides, as well as in-service training for social workers, are available throughout the country.

THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE provides all Israeli residents with a broad range of benefits such as supplementary payments to families and individuals whose income is below the determined minimum, child allowances, unemployment benefits, disability payments, survivors’ benefits, old-age pensions, maternity benefits (including up to three months’ paid leave) and long-term care for all elderly persons dependent on daily assistance.

PROJECT RENEWAL was launched in the late 1970s with the aim of rehabilitating disadvantaged neighborhoods. Under the direction of government and local authorities, with the active participation of nearly 100 Jewish communities abroad, each “twinned” with a specific locality, the project has successfully expanded and improved the social and educational infrastructure and motivated the residents to assume more responsibility for their own well-being.

VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS (278 of them), involving almost one third of Israel’s citizenry from teenagers to pensioners, are dedicated to a variety of activities in the areas of health, education, immigrant absorption, rehabilitation of the handicapped, soldiers’ welfare, the arts, environmental conservation and the like. Some groups provide direct community services, from day care centers to programs for senior citizens, while others deal with issues specific to a given group or locality. Various programs offer volunteers from abroad a chance to serve in Israel, usually on a short-term basis. The composition of the contemporary volunteer force differs from that of previous generations. Longevity provides many retirees, both men and women, with time to help out; and university students commonly volunteer to tutor disadvantaged children and teenagers.
Education

All Israelis, from preschoolers to senior citizens, benefit from a wide variety of educational programs. School attendance is mandatory from age 5 to 16 and free through age 18. Almost all three- and four-year-olds attend some kind of preschool program, though they are neither compulsory nor free.

The school system is based on the ongoing need to absorb and integrate new immigrants and educate children from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds - Jewish, Arab and Druze, religiously observant and secular. Accordingly, schools are divided into state schools, attended by the majority of pupils; state religious schools, which emphasize Jewish studies, tradition and observance; Arab and Druze schools, with instruction in Arabic and a special focus on Arab and Druze history, tradition and culture; and private schools, which operate under various religious and international auspices. At the high school level, students may select an academic, technological, agricultural or military framework. Individuals with special educational needs are accommodated according to their ability and handicap in the regular education system, with additional help, or at separate facilities.

To meet the requirements of the different types of schools, a wide range of programs and teaching materials are available in many subjects. Each year a special topic of national importance is chosen to be taught in depth, aimed at enhancing students’ understanding and appreciation of values such as democracy, environmental conservation, the Hebrew language and peace. The Ministry of Education is also involved in the ongoing process of bringing educational standards in line with modern pedagogic practices, such as mandating gender equality, upgrading teacher status, broadening humanistic curricula, and promoting scientific and technological studies. A key aspect of its policy is to provide equal opportunities in education for all children and to increase the number of pupils passing matriculation examinations.

The administration and financing of the education system is shared by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, the Ministry of Science and Technology and the municipalities. The ministries are responsible for curricula, educational standards, teacher training and the supervision of school personnel and school construction, while local authorities deal with school maintenance and the acquisition of equipment and supplies.

HIGHER EDUCATION plays a pivotal role in the country’s development. In the academic year 2009-2010, 280,000 students have enrolled in Israel’s institutions of higher learning, with about 38 percent attending universities, some 41 percent studying at various colleges and 21 percent participating in courses through the Open University. A wide range of programs - from bachelor degree to post-doctoral levels - in the sciences and humanities is available at Israel’s eight universities, while colleges offer academic courses as well as specialized training in fields such as elementary school teaching, music, art, fashion design and physical education. Additional tracks leading to vocational diplomas are available at several institutions.

ADULT EDUCATION. Tens of thousands of adults are enrolled in educational programs, some to improve basic knowledge and skills, many more to upgrade professional training, expand the scope of their learning and explore new interests. For new immigrants, special ulpanim offer intensive Hebrew language courses, usually of five months’ duration, after which most newcomers can deal with everyday communication.
The desire to transform a mostly barren land into a modern state was a key factor in Israel’s scientific inquiry and technological development. At first, research focused on projects of national importance. Today, the percentage of Israelis engaged in scientific and technological inquiry, and the amount spent on research and development (R&D) in relation to its GDP, are among the highest in the world. Bi-national research foundations play a crucial role in a wide variety of activities, ranging from basic research to industrial development and marketing. As the many highly trained scientists, engineers, and technicians among the hundreds of thousands of immigrants from the former Soviet Union gradually entered the labor force, the percentage of qualified personnel rose dramatically. They will significantly affect Israel’s scientific and technological achievements for decades to come.

R&D in Israel is carried out primarily at seven universities, dozens of government and public research institutes, and hundreds of civilian and military enterprises. Significant research is also performed at medical centers and by a number of public service firms, in fields such as telecommunications, power production, and water resources management.

R&D IN THE UNIVERSITIES: Israel’s large reservoir of qualified personnel is primarily responsible for its scientific and technological attainments, with over 80 percent of all publishable research conducted within Israel’s universities. The large number of patents taken out by the universities is indicative of their relationship with industry, and the establishment of science-based industrial parks adjacent to university campuses has met with great commercial success. Universities have also set up ‘spin-off’ industrial firms for the commercialization of specific products based on their research, often in partnership with local and foreign concerns.

MEDICAL R&D: Biotechnology, biomedical and clinical research account for over half of all scientific publications. Local scientists have developed methods for producing a human growth hormone, interferon (a group of proteins effective against viral infections), and Copaxone, a medicine effective in the treatment of multiple sclerosis. Genetic engineering, including cloning, has resulted in a wide range of diagnostic kits based on monoclonal antibodies, along with other microbiological products.

Sophisticated medical equipment for both diagnostic and treatment purposes has been developed and marketed worldwide, such as computer tomography (CT) scanners, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) systems, ultrasound scanners, nuclear medical cameras, surgical lasers, and a miniature camera encased in a swallowable capsule used to diagnose gastrointestinal disease.

INDUSTRIAL R&D: Israel’s industrial R&D, with a high concentration on electronics, is mainly carried out in a small number of large firms. These R&D-intensive companies have been a major source of industrial employment and exports over the years.

In communications, R&D-based applications include the digitalizing, processing, transmitting and enhancing of images, speech and data. Products range from advanced telephone exchanges to voice messaging systems and telephone line doublers. Israel is also a world leader in fiber optics, electro-optic inspection systems for printed circuit boards and thermal imaging night-vision systems. Computer-based equipment, mostly in software and peripheral fields, has been developed and produced. While some of Israel’s software products are designed for use on mainframe computers, most have been developed for small or medium-sized systems such as computer workstations. A computer mouse with three touchpads, allowing the visually impaired to “read” text and graphics on screen,
was recently developed. In addition, Israel produces robots designed to perform a wide variety of tasks, including diamond polishing, welding, packing and building. Research is now underway in the application of artificial intelligence to robots.

In the field of aeronautics, locally designed and manufactured satellites have been produced and launched by Israel Aircraft Industries in cooperation with the Israel Space Agency. In addition, Israel develops, manufactures and exports a large number of related items, including display systems, aeronautical computers, instrumentation systems and flight simulators, and is a world leader in drone technology and production. Israel’s first astronaut, Col. Ilan Ramon, was tragically killed along with his six NASA colleagues when the space shuttle Columbia disintegrated upon re-entry into the earth’s atmosphere.

AGRICULTURAL R&D: Making optimal use of scarce water, harsh land and a limited labor force has led to revolutions in agricultural methods. Agricultural R&D is carried out primarily by the Ministry of Agriculture’s Agricultural Research Organization, with research results quickly transmitted through an extension service system to the field for trial, and problems brought directly to the scientists for solutions.

Israel’s dairy cows are world champions in milk production, with scientific breeding and genetic testing raising the average yield per cow to over 10,000 liters per year. Agriculturists have also pioneered agricultural biotechnology, and advances have been applied to marketable products, ranging from genetically engineered seeds and biopesticides to light-degradable plastics and computerized irrigation/fertilization systems.

The search for water-saving techniques spurred development of computer-controlled irrigation systems, including the drip method, which directs water flow straight to the root zone of plants. As the result of intensive research, the huge underground reservoir of brackish water under the Negev is now being exploited to produce crops such as prime-quality tomatoes and melons for European and American winter markets. Israeli-designed and manufactured computers are widely used to coordinate daily farming activities such as guiding fertilizer injection while monitoring relevant environmental factors; supplying feed for livestock mixed according to tested least-cost/best-yield proportions; and providing a temperature and humidity controlled environment for poultry.

ENERGY R&D: Extensive development of alternative energy sources such as solar, thermal and wind energy has been a positive outcome of the country’s lack of conventional energy sources. Israel is a leader in the solar energy field at every level and the world’s largest per capita user of solar water heaters in the home. Recently a new, high-efficiency receiver to collect concentrated sunlight has been developed which will enhance the use of solar energy in industry as well. An advance in harnessing wind energy has been the production of a wind turbine with a flexible, inflatable rotor. A project developed by a team of scientists at the Technion uses dry air and water to produce energy through 1,000-meter high chimneys.
Economy

After having enjoyed for many years one of the fastest GDP growth rates of all world economies, Israel is now continuing the economic recovery that began in 2003, after a two-year slow-down in almost all economic activity. In 2006, Israel’s GDP rose by 5.1%, in spite of the Second Lebanon War, which caused a temporary loss of 0.7% of the GNP. The speedy recovery and the continuation of rapid growth were led by the business sector, which expanded by 6.4%, resulting in a per capita GDP of about $20,000 in 2006.

The country’s most remarkable economic achievement in the 61 years of its existence is the rate at which it has developed, while simultaneously dealing with four major challenges: maintaining national security, which now accounts for some eight percent of the GDP (in contrast to over 25% in the 1970s); absorbing large numbers of immigrants - the raison d’être of the Jewish state (over three million - a five-fold increase - since its inception in 1948); establishing a modern infrastructure to meet the requirements for economic growth; and providing a high level of public services.

The price for this impressive growth has been, until recently, a deficit in the balance of payments. In 2006, for the first time, exports surpassed imports. Foreign debt has been eliminated, with Israel becoming a creditor in recent years. In 2006, Israeli continued to achieve its main macroeconomic objectives: a very low, sometimes even negative rate of inflation (down from 445% in 1984!), a very low budget deficit, and a limited increase in public expenditure. Israel has also proven to be very attractive to international investors.

CURRENCY. The unit of currency is the shekel (divided into 100 agorot), known as a unit of weight for means of payment in gold and silver as early as the second millennium BCE. It is recorded in the Bible that Abraham’s servant approached Rebecca at the well with “a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her arms of ten shekel weight in gold/” (Genesis 24:22). The shekel was valued at $0.26 in August 2009.

MAJOR REFORMS. The New Israeli Shekel (NIS) is now a “hard” currency, traded freely on all international money markets. This is a comparatively recent development after decades of currency control, which was essential - as in many countries after World War II - for the survival and growth of the economy. The rate of exchange of the shekel is now, after removal of all foreign currency restrictions, determined by the international money market.

The economic reform program embarked on by the government in 2003 continues to reduce the budget (as well as taxes) further and streamline the economy. Whereas the government is still obligated to encouraging economic initiatives, its policy has succeeded - since the 1990s - in reducing its direct involvement in the economy. Thus, apart from almost eliminating subsidies supporting the prices of basic commodities and trimming down the entitlement for those directed at encouraging foreign investments and exports, it embarked on a major privatization campaign of selling the ownership of hundreds of public companies.

NATIONAL ECONOMY. The perennial problem of the trade deficit has been, until recently, the high price Israel has had to pay for the miracle of attaining rapid growth while successfully meeting other national challenges. This yearly gap between a high level of imports and a significantly smaller scale of exports indicated economic dependence on foreign resources. Thus, a primary policy goal - eventually reached recently - of every government was to achieve “economic independence,” the point where exports will finance all imports and this deficit will disappear.

With its small economy and relatively limited domestic market, Israel’s growth depends mainly upon expanding exports. Much of the country’s creative resources have been devoted to building its industrial exports. Joining the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), as well as instituting a free trade area for industrial products with the European Community (1975) and for all products with the United States (1985) has enhanced the competitiveness
of Israel’s exports. Hence, Israeli goods can enter - duty free - both the European Union (EU) and the United States. This enables local Israeli producers to aim for a market almost 110 times larger than the domestic one and attracts investors who wish to export their products to Europe without paying duty. Israeli investors also forged joint ventures with Jordanian and Egyptian businesses in special industrial zones that enable the export of products duty-free to the US and the EU.

To maximize chances of success, local Israeli enterprises have sought to identify segments of international trade where they can carve out specialized niches for themselves. The establishment of joint ventures with foreign industrial firms has often utilized a blend of local innovations and large-scale foreign production and market penetration. Joint projects have been undertaken in areas such as electronics, software, medical equipment, printing, and computerized graphics. Many of these joint projects are assisted in recruiting capital for joint ventures through frameworks such as bi-national development, research and cooperation foundations.

THE ECONOMIC PICTURE. The high level of public consumption, in particular the resulting large deficit in the government’s budget, was always a primary cause of Israel’s high inflation rate. The pursuit of economic viability called for checking inflation, reducing the balance-of-payments deficit, and maintaining rapid economic growth, all of which required curtailing the high public expenditure that has taken place in recent years. The financing of Israel’s massive public expenditure required heavy taxation, which its citizens had to bear, for years. In recent years, changes to the tax system were adopted to integrate Israel more firmly into the global economy.

LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT. Extensive legislation exists for the protection and welfare of workers. Minimum requirements are anchored in law, including a maximum 47-hour workweek, compensation for overtime and holiday work, paid annual vacation and sick leave, as well as severance payments and pension plans. Wages and specific working conditions in the various economic sectors are set forth in agreements negotiated between the government (as a major employer), the various trade unions and the organizations of employers.

INDUSTRY. Israel is today an industrialized country with most of its manufacturing, including many traditional fields, based on intensive and sophisticated Research & Development and hi-tech processes, tools, and machinery. This is the outcome of very rapid and intensive development.

The vast investment in aviation and armament industries created new technologies that became the base for Israel’s unique hi-tech industries, such as medical devices, electronics, computer software and hardware, telecommunications, etc. In the 1980s, Israelis who worked in the Silicon Valley returned to Israel, opening development centers of multinational companies such as Intel, Microsoft, IBM, and others. In the 1990s, a highly skilled immigration of scientists, engineers, technicians, and medical workers from the former Soviet Union enabled the upgrading of Israel’s industry to its current level of sophistication, with its array of export products.

Due to its lack of natural resources and raw materials, Israel’s one advantage is its highly qualified labor force, scientific institutes, and R&D centers. Today, Israeli industry concentrates mostly on manufacturing products with high added value, by developing products based on Israel’s own scientific creativity and technological innovation.

HI-TECH INDUSTRIES. The fastest growth rates (averaging 8 percent annually in recent years) are to be found in the hi-tech sectors, which are skill and capital intensive and require sophisticated production techniques, as well as considerable investment in research and development, on which 4.4 percent of Israel’s GDP is spent - by far one of the highest rate in the world). The quality of this R&D in Israel is ranked, according to U.N. experts, among the first 10 in the world. A successful contribution to all these is due to academic research institutes, which provide much of the basic R&D and venture capital.

The age of information technology (the Internet, electronic commerce, etc.) placed Israel’s economy, and particularly its hi-tech industries, in the forefront of world development.
in these fields. A number of internationally recognized Israeli companies have been bought by top business conglomerates in multi-billion dollar transactions.

The number of new start-ups is very high due to the extraordinary innovative talent in Israel, coupled with the availability of highly skilled manpower. The growing presence of Israeli firms on Wall Street and the European stock exchanges is yet another manifestation of the respect with which Israel’s hi-tech industry is regarded.

ISRAEL’S DIAMOND INDUSTRY. Israel is a leading world diamond manufacturing and trading center. The main reason is that the Israeli diamond industry is as multi-faceted as its diamonds. The Israeli diamond is synonymous with trust and reliability, and it is guaranteed to be conflict-free and genuine.

In addition, the Israeli diamond industry is a world leader in both cutting-edge technologies and craftsmanship, thus ensuring the best yield of polished diamonds from the rough. The large inventory of local production, as well as tax-free rough and polished imports, ensures competitive prices. The Israel Diamond Exchange is the largest diamond-trading floor in the world, housing all of the operational functions and needs of every diamond buyer under one roof.

Israel produces most of the world’s output of small polished stones, which are used in jewelry settings. It is also responsible for 40 percent of the polishing of diamonds of all sizes and shapes, making Israel the world’s leading diamond-polishing center in terms of both production and marketing.

AGRICULTURE. Israel has become a world leader in quality, high-yielding agriculture, with farmers and researchers cooperating in developing and applying sophisticated science-based methods in all agricultural branches.

Locally designed and manufactured machinery and electronic equipment are widely used in farming activities, from irrigation and harvesting to milking and packing.

Making maximum use of scarce water and arable land, Israel produces more food than it needs for its own use. Imports include mainly grain, meat, tea, coffee, rice and sugar, while it exports much more, with long stemmed roses, spray carnations, melons, kiwis, strawberries, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and avocados among the most successful, especially in European and American markets during the cold winter months.

CONSTRUCTION. Israeli companies are among the world leaders in the design and manufacture of building metal structures, prefabricated parts and components - such as doors, windows, sanitary equipment, plumbing components, fixtures and accessories, and more. These goods are successfully marketed worldwide and may be found at major construction sites on all continents.

TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS. The importance of the transport and communications sector largely exceeds its small share in the economy’s statistics, as it is an infrastructure industry serving all other branches of the economy as well as households. A remarkable growth in the aviation segment of this sector took place in recent years (thanks to a parallel increase in tourism), but the growth of the communications sector has been even faster.

Since the early 1950s, the total gross tonnage of the merchant fleet has grown more than tenfold, while air carriers now fly more than 100 times as many passengers. During the same period, the road length was doubled, the number of buses more than tripled, and the number of trucks increased tenfold.

TOURISM. Tourists are attracted by Israel’s geographical diversity, its archeological and religious sites, the almost unlimited sunshine and modern resort facilities on the Mediterranean, Lake Kinneret (Sea of Galilee), the Red Sea, and the Dead Sea. Although this industry contributes less than 3% to the GNP, it has a foreign currency added value of 85 percent (making it the added-value leader among the country’s export industries) and employs some 80,000 persons. This industry’s large potential is yet to be exploited, as it is a major factor in Israel’s economic growth plan.
Culture and Leisure

Four thousand years of Jewish heritage, a century of political Zionism and six decades of modern statehood have contributed to the development of an Israeli culture which reflects worldwide elements while striving for an authentic identity of its own. Cultural expression through the arts in Israel is as varied as the people themselves, with activities for every taste, offering professional talent of international standard alongside a wealth of opportunities for aspiring artists and amateurs.

THEATER. Theater in Israel is composed of many different elements - contemporary and classical, indigenous and imported, experimental and traditional - with playwrights, actors, directors, and producers of many backgrounds merging the foreign with the local and thereby gradually creating a distinctive Israeli theater. The theater scene is very active, with many professional repertory and other theaters, and dozens of regional and amateur companies performing throughout the country to large and devoted audiences. In recent years, a number of Israeli companies have toured Eastern and Western Europe and the United States, and have participated in international festivals, including the Edinburgh and Berlin Festivals, and appeared in major theater events in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere. A number of semi-professional and amateur groups perform in English and Russian. The major professional companies are located in the country’s four largest cities.

LIGHT ENTERTAINMENT. The concept of ‘popular’ entertainment began in pre-state Israel during the 1940s but its major impetus occurred during the 1960s with the formation of entertainment troupes attached to different military units. While television and radio are the main outlets for popular entertainment, live performances by comedians, singers, musicians, bands, and groups take place regularly throughout the country. Certain artists have made a name for themselves abroad, including Dudu Fisher, the late Ofra Haza, Rami Kleinstein, Aviv Gefen, David Broza, and Noa (Ahinoam Nini). In 1998, Israeli transsexual Dana International won the Eurovision song contest and become a global star. The contemporary music scene in Israel is hugely varied and often audacious. Many of the newcomers to Israeli music’s pop scene have emerged through the TV program Kochav Nolad (A Star Is Born), Israel’s answer to the US’s American Idol. Increasingly popular among all Israelis is a Mediterranean musical genre deriving primarily from Arabic and Greek influences. Grand-scale musicals in Hebrew translation, including “Les Miserables” and “The Sound of Music,” have been revived to enthusiastic acclaim. A new generation of stand-up comics is beginning to command substantial followings.

CINEMA. Filmmaking in Israel has undergone major developments since its inception in the 1950s. The first features produced and directed by Israelis tended, like Israeli literature of the period, to be cast in the heroic mold. Some recent films remain deeply rooted in the Israeli experience, dealing with such subjects as Holocaust survivors and their children and the travails of new immigrants. Others reflect a more predominant trend towards the present Israeli reality, whether dealing with the Israel-Arab confrontation or set in the context of a universalist, somewhat alienated and hedonistic society.

Israeli films and filmmakers have won numerous international awards in recent years. Cinema exports are growing as more Israeli-made films become successful abroad and more dollar-earning foreign and co-productions are filmed on location in the country. The Israel Film Center, a division of the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor, promotes filmmaking in Israel by both local and foreign producers and provides services from arranging
professional contacts to offering financial incentives. Such major events as the Israel Film Festival at the Jerusalem Cinematheque, along with similar events in Haifa and Sderot, combined with Israeli film festivals abroad, all help to promote awareness about Israeli film.

Incorporating Frontispiece of the Schocken Bible 1290, Word Stamp Exhibition 1985

The recently renovated Jerusalem Cinematheque consists of an archive of thousands of films, a research library, viewing halls, and exhibition space. The Spielberg Film Archive at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem is the world’s largest repository of film material on Jewish themes as well as on Jewish and Israeli life. Run by the university together with the Central Zionist Archives, its main activity is collecting, preserving and cataloguing Jewish films, and making the material available to researchers, film and television writers, and producers throughout the world.

CLASSICAL MUSIC. Music began to occupy an important place in the cultural life of the Jewish community in the Land of Israel after World War I. Music on a professional level, however, became a major activity only in the 1930s when hundreds of music teachers and students, composers, instrumentalists and singers, as well as thousands of music lovers, streamed into the country, driven by the threat of Nazism in Europe. The Palestine Philharmonic Orchestra (today the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra) gave its first concert in Tel Aviv in 1936. It immediately became one of the pivots of the country’s musical life and over the years acquired the reputation as one of the preeminent orchestras in the world. Soon after, a radio orchestra was established (today the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra), whose broadcast concerts attracted tens of thousands of listeners. Additional musical organizations were founded at later dates, including the Israel Chamber Orchestra, the Be’er Sheva Sinfonietta, and orchestras based in Haifa, Netanya, Holon, Ramat Gan and Rishon Lezion, as well as the Israel Kibbutz Orchestra. In the early 1980s, the New Israeli Opera began mounting productions on a high professional level, reviving public enthusiasm for operatic works.

During the early 1990s, Israel’s musical life underwent a transformation with the massive influx of over one million Jews from the former Soviet Union. This immigration brought with it many professional musicians, including instrumentalists, singers, and music teachers, whose impact was felt with the formation of new symphony and chamber orchestras, as well as smaller ensembles, and a dynamic injection of talent and musical vitality into educational frameworks in schools, conservatories, and community centers throughout the country. The chamber music tradition, which also began in the 1930s, includes a number of internationally acclaimed ensembles and choral groups, which have expanded in range and variety since the immigration of the 1990s.

DANCE. In the communal and religious life of the Jewish people, dance has been regarded as an expression of joy
and sorrow since biblical times and is today an integral part of religious, national, community, and family celebrations. Israeli folk dance emerged as an amalgam of Jewish and non-Jewish folk dance forms from many parts of the world. While in other countries folk dance is fostered to preserve old rural traditions, in Israel it is a constantly developing art form which has evolved since the 1940s, based on historic and modern sources as well as on biblical associations and contemporary dance styles. The early pioneers brought with them native dances which were adapted to their new milieu. Among them, a Romanian dance, the hora, typified the new life being built in the Land of Israel: its closed circle form gave equal status to all participants, simple movements enabled everyone to take part, and the linked arms symbolized the new ideology. Since 1988, a three-day international folk-dance festival has been held annually at Karmiel, a town in central Galilee, with the participation of troupes from Israel and around the world.

Dance as an art form was introduced in the country in the 1920s by newly arrived teachers and devotees of dance from the cultural centers of Europe. After the establishment of the state, it was developed to a high professional level by a number of ensembles, each based on a different orientation and style. Today more than a dozen major professional dance companies, most of them based in Tel Aviv, perform a varied repertoire throughout the country and abroad. Israel’s contributions to the field of movement education include the methods of Moshe Feldenkrais, which are taught all over the world, and the Eshkol-Wachman movement notation system, one of the three best-known systems of recording dance and movement in written form.

PEOPLE OF THE BOOK. Basic to the development of literature in the country is the century-long revival of Hebrew, both for everyday use and as an expressive literary language. Authors and poets deal extensively with local images and events as well as with universal themes, reflecting the changing nature of the country’s concerns and the development of its complex, multilayered society. Some 2,500 titles are published annually, which, in addition to republications of classics and imported books, may be found in the many bookshops of every town and city. About 1,000 libraries provide reference and lending facilities, including several bookmobiles serving outlying districts. The biennial International Book Fair draws thousands of visitors to Jerusalem, and every spring Hebrew Book Week turns city squares and parks into crowded book markets. In addition to the prolific body of Hebrew literature, a significant amount of writing, both prose and poetry, appears in other languages, including Arabic, English, and French. Since the immigration of over one million Jews from the former Soviet Union, Israel has become the largest center of literary creativity in the Russian language outside Russia itself.

VISUAL ARTS. Contemporary painting, sculpture, photography, and other art forms, while reflecting international trends, are also influenced by the specific Israeli temperament and landscape. Art in all its forms enjoys wide exposure at museums and in the many galleries spread throughout the country. Old neighborhoods in Jerusalem, Jaffa and Safed have been restored as artists’ quarters, and the artists’ village of Ein Hod lies nestled in the Carmel mountains, near Haifa, for those seeking art in a rustic setting.

MUSEUMS. Some 200 museums, covering subjects from archeology to zoology, are maintained in cities, towns and kibbutzim throughout the country and receive millions of visitors annually. The Israel Museum, the country’s national museum, devotes areas to archeology, Judaica, Impressionist and Israeli painting, as well as special collections such as the Dead Sea Scrolls. Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Authority, includes a new museum that documents events of the period through dozens of video screens as well as the traditional glass-encased exhibits. Ha’aretz Museum and others feature exhibits specific to the development of the country, from prehistoric times onwards. Unique in concept, the Museum of the Diaspora (Beit Hatefutzot), traces the history of world Jewish communities by means of scale models, dioramas and audio-visual displays.

ARCHEOLOGY. The link between the country’s past and present is substantiated by some 20,000 recognized
sites of antiquity in Israel that are protected by law, representing thousands of years of history. Every year, dozens of sites from every period of history and in all parts of the country are excavated. Finds attesting to the long connection of the Jewish people with the Land of Israel include Solomon’s stables at Megiddo, houses from the Israelite period in the City of David (Jerusalem), ritual baths at Masada, numerous synagogues throughout the country and the Dead Sea scrolls, containing the earliest extant copy of the Book of Isaiah in still-readable Hebrew script. Excavations have also revealed the vestiges of other civilizations which have left their imprint on the land over the centuries. All finds are recorded, and historical sites are carefully preserved and marked, for scholar and visitor alike.

Archeology in Jerusalem 18th Century Relief, Jewish Quarter

MEDIA. The tradition of a free press, an integral part of Israel’s democracy, is expressed by the publication of seven Hebrew-language dailies and eleven in other languages, including Arabic, as well as a large number of periodicals. Two television channels, cable and satellite TV (local channels as well as dozens from around the world) and several radio stations present a wide variety of programs, including news, interviews, panel discussions, game shows, films and entertainment, in addition to educational and cultural features. Programming in Arabic is geared to the interests of the Arab population, while that in other languages caters to the needs of immigrant groups and tourists. Shortwave broadcasts are transmitted regularly for listeners abroad.

SPORTS. Soccer and basketball are Israel’s most popular sports, with swimming, tennis, volleyball, gymnastics, track-and-field and other activities gaining additional enthusiasts every year. Local teams participate regularly in league competition before large crowds of loyal fans, while national teams represent the country in international championships. Israel’s major sports organizations (Maccabi, Betar, Hapoel and Elizur) sponsor local teams in various sports as well as programs for youth in which the country’s future champions are trained. Jewish athletes from all over the world come to Israel to compete in the Maccabiah and Hapoel Games, each held at four-year intervals.

Special events such as the annual marathon run around Lake Kinneret (Sea of Galilee) and the swim across it, as well as the Jerusalem March, draw thousands of participants. Camping and hiking are becoming increasingly popular, with about 6.5 million visits registered annually at the numerous national parks and nature reserves across Israel. For those with a taste for adventure, off-the-beaten-track hikes are organized in some of the world’s most spectacular scenery, scuba diving expeditions explore the magnificent coral reefs in the Gulf of Eilat and opportunities for horseback riding along the forest trails of Galilee, on the Mediterranean beaches and in other parts of the country range from an hour’s outing to trips of several days’ duration. In recent years, participation in bicycle and automobile racing, hang-gliding, rappelling, sailing and windsurfing has also been growing.
ISRAEL AMONG THE NATIONS. The State of Israel has been a member of the United Nations since 1949 and maintains relations with the majority of states around the world. With memories of centuries of persecution, the devastating experience of the Holocaust and the decades-long Arab-Israeli conflict, Israel’s foreign policy has been geared to advance peace, while ensuring the country’s security and promoting cooperation with all nations.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION. An ongoing aspect of Israel’s relations with many developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America is the sharing of its accumulated knowledge and expertise in fields such as agriculture, regional planning, public health, and community development. Since its establishment, Israel has been eager to share with the international community skills learned from its own development experience. This desire led to the founding, in 1958, of MASHAV - The Center for International Cooperation - as a department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, responsible for the planning and implementation of Israel’s international cooperation program. MASHAV’s programs are based on the transfer of technological skills and human resource enrichment. In cooperation with government ministries, professional and academic institutions, and research centers throughout Israel, MASHAV works in partnership with countries in the developing world and with those whose economies are in transition, towards overcoming their respective development challenges in areas such as poverty alleviation, primary health care, food security, early childhood education, combating desertification, gender equality, small and medium enterprises, and integrated rural development. In the context of the Middle East peace process, MASHAV places priority on establishing development programs with its neighbors, in an effort to promote peaceful cooperation through economic and social development.

Since the State of Israel was admitted to the United Nations (UN) as its 59th member on 11 May 1949, it has participated in a wide range of UN operations and has endeavored to make its full contribution to UN organizations dealing with health, labor, food and agriculture, education and science. Israel plays an active role in the work of nongovernmental organizations, conducted under UN auspices, which deal with issues ranging from aviation to immigration, from communications to meteorology, from trade to the status of women.

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. The United States’ immediate recognition of the new state of Israel in 1948 marked the beginning of a relationship based on common values and characterized by deep friendship and mutual respect. Both nations are vibrant democracies whose political and legal systems are anchored in liberal traditions; both began as pioneer societies; and both are still integrating new immigrants. Israel and the United States share a wide range of foreign policy objectives, including the resolution of the conflict through peaceful means, although at times the two countries have ‘agreed to disagree,’ settling their differences as friends and allies. The strong ties between the two countries are also expressed in the bonds between the peoples of Israel and the US, as well as in partnerships in the technological, economic, ecological, security, cultural and scientific fields.

Canada recognized Israel de jure in 1949 and Israel and Canada have had full diplomatic relations for many years, based on common democratic values, with bilateral links enhanced by cultural and scientific exchanges.

Today Israel maintains full diplomatic relations with almost all of the countries of Central and South America and the Caribbean region. These relations are reflected in productive cooperation in the political, economic and cultural spheres, as well as in a large number of bilateral agreements in many areas.

Western Europe is Israel’s most natural trading partner given its close geographic proximity and similar political systems. The Israel-European Union (EU) Association Agreement, signed in 1995, came into force in June 2000, allowing for heightened political dialogue, as well as closer economic relations. In the mid-1990s, Israel joined the Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development of the EU. In December 2004, the Action Plan under the European
Neighborhood Policy was concluded between Israel and the European Union. In November 2007, the EU-Israel Business Dialogue was established with the aim of promoting understanding and cooperation between the private sectors of the parties.

Along with the United States, Russia, and the United Nations, the European Union is a member of the Quartet which seeks to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict through the peace process.

Relations between Israel and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which were renewed as soon as these countries restored their democracies, are becoming increasingly close, especially in economic matters, culture, tourism, and international cooperation activities. Economic agreements with these countries are of particular importance, given that many of them are members of the European Union or candidates for future membership.

Israel’s ties with the Russian Federation are of strategic importance given its active involvement in the diplomatic process in the Middle East (as a member of the Quartet) and in dealings with Iran over its nuclear program. Israel’s relations with the Eurasian states (former Soviet Union) have gained momentum, particularly in the political, economic and cultural realms. Official visits and new agreements have laid a solid foundation for expanding these relations. Trade and investment ties are showing impressive growth. More than a million former Soviet citizens now living in Israel form a human bridge between Israel and their countries of origin, adding a special dimension to the relations. Israel continues to enhance its relations with Central Asian Caucasus states, where there is great demand for Israeli MASHAV aid in the fields of public health, advanced agriculture, water resource management and the fight against desertification.

Israel’s ties with the Sub-Saharan African countries date from the mid-1950s; and have undergone various transitions. Since the 1980s, diplomatic relations have been gradually renewed, gaining momentum as peace negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors progressed. By the late 1990s, official ties had been reestablished with 39 countries south of the Sahara. Today, Israel and the Sub-Saharan countries are engaged in an ongoing political dialogue, expressed in reciprocal visits by heads of state and government ministers. Furthermore, dynamic activities exist, including economic and commercial ties, cultural and academic contacts, multiple joint agricultural projects, medical assistance, professional training programs and humanitarian aid in times of need.

Israel maintains diplomatic relations with most Asian states. The growing economic strength and political influence of these countries has contributed to the intensification of ties in the political, cultural and, above all, economic spheres. Technical cooperation with Israel in the areas of scientific R&D, rural development, agriculture and education has played an important role in strengthening relations with the developing countries of the region.

Israel and Egypt signed a peace treaty in 1979, marking the end of 30 years of relentless hostility and five costly wars. President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their achievement. Although Egypt was ostracized by other Arab states following the signing of the treaty, all have since reestablished relations with Egypt and reopened their embassies in Cairo. Having to overcome 30 years of distrust and hostility, normalization of relations between Israel and Egypt is a long and arduous process. Yet, embassies and consulates were established by both countries, and high-ranking meetings take place regularly.

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Hanukkah Stamp issued jointly with the U.S.

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Peace – Stamp issued in honor of the peace agreement with Jordan

The peace treaty between Jordan and Israel was signed in 1994. Although de facto at war with each other for 46 years, Israel and Jordan had maintained secret contacts and concluded mutually beneficial agreements throughout that period. The most significant expression of the peaceful relations is the establishment of Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZs), which enables Jordan, via cooperation with Israel, to export to the US quota-free and tariff-free commodities worth more than one billion dollars. Israel is also cooperating with Jordan in agricultural projects and in public health.

There have been varying degrees of contact with the
Gulf States since the Oslo peace process. In 1994, three North African Arab states - Morocco, Mauritania, and Tunisia - joined other Arab countries and chose to take the path of peace and reconciliation by forming diplomatic ties with Israel. As with all the Arab states, even when ties are officially broken off due to political events, some commercial relations and tourism continue, as well as contacts in other fields.

President Ezer Weizman and Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Other events included meetings with the chief rabbis and visits to Yad Vashem and to the Western Wall. The visit emphasized the continuing process of understanding between Judaism and the Catholic Church. His successor, Pope Benedict XVI, visited Israel in May 2009, and was welcomed to the Holy Land as a friend of the State of Israel and the Jewish people. His visit marked an important stage in the development of the relationship between the Vatican and Israel, strengthening the dialogue between Christianity, Judaism and Islam, as part of the effort to achieve peace in the region.

ISRAEL AND WORLD JEWRY. Recent estimates put the total world Jewish population at over 13 million, of whom 42 percent live in Israel, and nearly 40 percent in the United States. The relationship between Diaspora Jewry and Israel operates on many levels, and the ongoing dialogue between them includes a wide range of issues of mutual interest and concern. For its part, Israel seeks to strengthen its ties with Diaspora Jewish communities by promoting Jewish-Zionist activities, fostering the study of the Hebrew language, encouraging visits by tourists and study missions, attracting financial investment and initiating joint economic projects. Diaspora Jews participate in the building of the country through monetary contributions, social and political support and by settling in Israel, adding their particular skills and cultural backgrounds to the Israel mosaic.

Facts in Figures

| POPULATION: | 7,427,000 |
| Jews: | 75.5% |
| Non-Jews: | 24.5% |

| POPULATION DISTRIBUTION |
| Cities and Towns: | 91.7% |
| Thereof: | Jerusalem: 10.4% |
| Tel Aviv: | 5.3% |
| Haifa: | 3.6% |
| Villages and community settlements: | 3.1% |
| Moshavim: | 3.3% |
| Kibbutzim: | 1.7% |

| LIFE EXPECTANCY |
| Women: | 82.5 |
| Men: | 78.8 |

| DISTRIBUTION OF THE WORK FORCE |
| Public, Community & Personal Services: | 40.1% |
| Manufacturing: | 13.3% |
| Tourism, Commerce and Finance: | 26% |
| Agriculture: | 1.9% |
| Other: | 18.6% |

| ECONOMY (NIS billion) (12/2005) |
| Gross Domestic Product: | 674 billion |
| Gross Domestic Product per capita | 93,808 |
| Exports of goods and services: | 291 billion |
| Imports of goods and services: | 302 billion |

Statistics:
Central Bureau of Statistics and Bank of Israel

“A Land Flowing with Milk and Honey” Exodus 5:8
copies may be obtained at the diplomatic missions of Israel.
Additional information on the Internet: http://www.mfa.gov.il