



## **From a virtual World Zionist Congress to a Real Zionism**

Rabbi Mauricio Balter

Chairman of Mercaz Olami and Masorti Olami

In the few weeks since the 38th World Zionist Congress finished I have experienced several feelings I would like to share with you.

Firstly:

The virtual World Zionist Congress was a mayor challenge. Generally speaking, and given the circumstances, it was successful. We were able to see each other and discuss some topics of concern for the Zionist world. This first Virtual World Zionist Congress in history was extremely challenging due to the limitations imposed by the Coronavirus but it was still successful. All attendees from around the globe were connected with their personal devices, seeing one another and engaging in discussions about the most relevant issues for today's Zionist world.

Secondly:

Following our WhatsApp group's chats during the Congress truly moved me. Every day, the group organized a virtual meal in Jerusalem. Choosing the restaurant or the menu evidenced how strong the urge to be together and share was, and especially, each message beamed with everyone's desire to be in Israel. The fact that it was impossible filled me with sadness as much as your every thought about Israel picturing you here overjoyed me.

Thirdly:

I will not elaborate on the political agreements and what transpired at the Congress. However, it did lead me to deeply reflect on the differences between ideology and politics. The feeling I get when we engage in discussions with the Israeli political parties is that we, conservative/Masorti Jews, come from a different world, one with values and ideology that result in a different dialogue.

This Congress shone a light on how much Israeli politics tainted our Zionist world. David Ben Gurion always spoke of a "normal" State, just like every other. Is the fact that these institutions are politicized part of the normalcy Ben Gurion referred to?

This was my first Congress as Chairman of Mercaz Olami. I want to acknowledge our professional team: Nilli Glick Asaf's dedication and her rapport with the different Mercaz chapters around the world. Tehila Reuben's boundless capacity to help, bringing all of her years of experience with the National Institutions. I also need to mention the passion and dedication of the Mercaz Olami Board, headed by President Rabbi Alan Silverstein, treasurer Emily Levy Shojat and the Mercaz Olami Committee that devote limitless amounts of time, passion and wisdom to energize the Masorti Movement within the National Institutions.

The virtual Congress allowed us to fulfil the legal obligation of voting new authorities in and move forward with certain specific issues. Now we need to move past the virtual Zionism to a REAL one. We need it to be real and alive. We need to strengthen the bond of the Masorti movement with the State of Israel, especially with the younger generations. Five years of mayor challenges lie ahead of us and our drive is the great love we have for the State and the People of Israel. We need to work together to build a REAL and LIVE Zionism. Let's remember Herzl's words "if you will it, it is no dream.