

Remarks of Deborah Isaac

Installation as AZM President

June 22, 2021

I would like to first acknowledge the work that has been done by our outgoing administration: Richard, Francine and all the outgoing officers along with Herb and Alicia - who are of course staying on with the new administration- for breathing new life into the AZM and beginning the process of raising the profile of the organization.

I would like to also acknowledge the nominating committee, led by Francine Stein, for taking something of a leap of faith in nominating me for this position. First off, it is no easy task to fashion a slate for an umbrella organization such as this which must ensure that there is appropriate representation of the diverse voices of the organization while at the same time choosing candidates that it feels bring to the table a mix of skill sets that will be beneficial. Second, I was not the obvious choice.

So, who am I and what do I bring to the table?

I come from an ardently Zionist family as many of you do. That being said, on my first trip to Israel at elementary school age, my uncle picked us up from the airport at what we now call terminal 1 and we drove out on a palm tree lined road past what I later came to know is kibbutz beerot yitzchak and my uncle asked me: "so what do you think of Israel?". My answer? Looks like Miami.

My understanding of Israel evolved from there through years of attending Jewish day schools, summer camp, Bnei Akiva, a year of study in Israel, many visits to Israel and through devoting vast amounts of time and energy to pro-Israel causes-chief among them a deep involvement in AMIT.

For those less familiar with the intricacies of what AMIT does, in a nutshell, AMIT runs schools and educational programs throughout Israel making sure that every child, regardless of socioeconomic background, receives the best and most cutting edge education possible. My time at AMIT, serving communities that are not frequented by tourists, allowed me to understand Israel in ways that I otherwise would not have.

During the decades that I have been involved, I found that, working with others, I was able to significantly impact the organization through reworking the organizational structure and bylaws, reinvigorating leadership and thinking outside the box to change how education was managed and delivered on the ground. I am proud of the transformations that I led and participated in at AMIT and I stand ready to lead transformative change at the AZM. I believe my strength is in seeing talent in others and

empowering and enabling a team of leaders to use their skills to collectively achieve results. I am grateful to be blessed with what I believe is a strong cadre of officers elected with me who I am certain will be a tremendous asset to AZM.

I fully recognize that transformative change at an umbrella organization comes with additional challenges. As an umbrella organization it is the job of the AZM to help our member organizations be more effective and to nurture start up organizations that bring a fresh perspective on how to achieve our shared goals.

It is quite interesting to me that Zionism has suddenly become a hot topic. While the organized Jewish world overall previously shied away from Zionism per se, today I am seeing a resurgence of interest in panels about Zionism, young people identifying as Zionists and even literature focusing on Zionism receiving a more mainstream audience. It is a bit of a curious phenomenon that I haven't quite understood fully yet but it means to me that this is our moment.

The meaning of Zionism is being debated, perhaps tweaked, and we need to be having these conversations here, in a respectful manner and focusing on what unites us and not on what divides us.

Do I have an exact roadmap for what we do next? No. But what I intend to do is to get to know each of the organizations better by first listening to its leaders and then making sure that all of us know and understand each of the member, associate and youth organizations well. We also need to spend more time getting to know each other personally. We need to be a safe place for discourse and more importantly for joint action. Our focus must be on the merits of what we need to accomplish and not on left or right whether that be religious or political. There is far more that unites us than divides us. There are plenty of forces out there in the world that work against us. We must not be spending our precious resources working against each other.

Overall, I have three goals: first, reinvigorate AZM's relationship with the WZO. AZM is the designated representative of the Zionist leadership of the single largest population of Jews in the diaspora and I intend to represent the Zionist community of the United States vigorously in the national institutions.

Second, we must understand, support and mentor young Zionists. We must do this not just in the traditional youth movements but also in new forms that often more accurately reflect the viewpoint and perspective of today's youth. It is particularly important that we do this with regard to students on university campuses nationwide.

Third, I will do everything in my power to re-establish an atmosphere of collegial partnership among the members and affiliates of this organization.

We all undoubtedly agree that Israel is the ONE AND ONLY homeland of the Jewish people. Zionism is about that peoplehood. There is only one place in the entire world that will protect us no matter where we are and regardless of our status as citizen or non-citizen.

We must celebrate and elevate Israel with every fiber of our being.

If we want every Jewish person, especially the young Jewish people to feel in their heart that Israel is their home we must focus on the positive. We are the cheerleaders. Our focus should be on the unique and amazing Israeli culture, humanitarian achievements and economic growth and opportunity that Israel represents.

Maybe we sponsor falafel Wednesdays in colleges around the country, maybe we promote startup nation job fairs at every university. Maybe we own Yom Haatzmaut with the most amazing not to be missed celebration. For sure we take a deep dive into social media and for sure we do all of this TOGETHER.

I invite every one of you to be part of the team that celebrates and elevates our homeland, Israel.

One final word- I didn't get to this moment without the tremendous support of my family: my husband David and children: Tani and Molly, Jared, Eliana and Arielle and I won't get far without their continued support. So thank you to the Isaac family, as well as to my AMIT family.

I look forward to getting to know as many of you as possible and working together with you to achieve our shared goals.