

Jewish Scene

Zionist Congress unites Diaspora, youth and entrepreneurs in Israel

World Zionist Organization to host Jewish leaders from over 40 countries in 125th Zionist Congress; This year's conference will feature hundreds of entrepreneurs and 14 different Jewish youth groups from around the world; Jewish leaders: Congress is a 'momentous occasion'



Emily Schrader | 08:53

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Over 2,000 Jews from around the world are gathering in Jerusalem this week for the Zionist Congress of the World Zionist Organization to mark the 75th anniversary of the State of Israel and the [125th anniversary](#) of the first Zionist Congress in Basel.

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The World Zionist Congress is a gathering of Zionist Jewish representatives from forty countries around the world, and is the highest body in terms of legislation and policy-making of the World Zionist Organization, which acts similarly to a Jewish parliament. The delegates are elected representatives from the Zionist Federations all over the world, whose members are members of the World Zionist Organization.



President Isaac Herzog at World Zionist Congress marking 125th anniversary in Basel (Photo: World Zionist Organization, Courtesy)

The conference will be attended by Israeli President Isaac Herzog, as well as global Jewish community leaders and hundreds of entrepreneurs with the intent of advancing Theodor Herzl's vision for Zionism in the coming year.

Yakov Hagoel, chairman of the World Zionist Organization told Ynet, "We are proud to be hosting the thousands of Jews who have come to Israel despite security tensions in Israel as a gesture of Zionist unity and solidarity."

On the escalating security situation in Israel and internal tensions over the Israeli government, Hagoel added, "The situation in Israel requires us to remember that we are family and it doesn't matter where each of us come from in the world...The thousands of Jews who have come to Israel will return to their countries of origin with the goal of marketing the State of Israel as a Jewish State based on Herzl's democratic and social vision."

This year's [Zionist Congress](#) will include the Herzl Conference for Social and Economic Entrepreneurship with over 300 entrepreneurs who seek to put Herzl's vision into practice.

The forum will deal with ideas, initiatives and projects that can advance and focus Israel's industries in multiple fields including the United Nation's seventeen Sustainable Development Goals – SDGs.

Youth outreach and Zionist education

A youth conference for informal education and young leadership will also be held as part of the Congress. Among the participants will be nearly 1,000 young Israelis who will meet with Jewish youth leaders from the United States, Canada, Australia, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, the Netherlands, Mexico, Belgium, Ecuador, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Chile, Costa Rica, Paraguay, Peru, Italy, Spain, New Zealand, and Venezuela.



First Zionist Congress with Theodor Herzl (Photo: World Zionist Organization, Courtesy)

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The youth participants represent fourteen different global Zionist youth movements, and will take part in round table discussions on the topics of Zionism, the State of Israel and the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora.

Sergio Edelstein, board member of the World Zionist Organization who is responsible for the youth conference stated, "The connection between the young people who are part of Zionist youth movements and who will lead Diaspora Jewry and the State of Israel and the future generation is a strategic asset for the State of Israel."

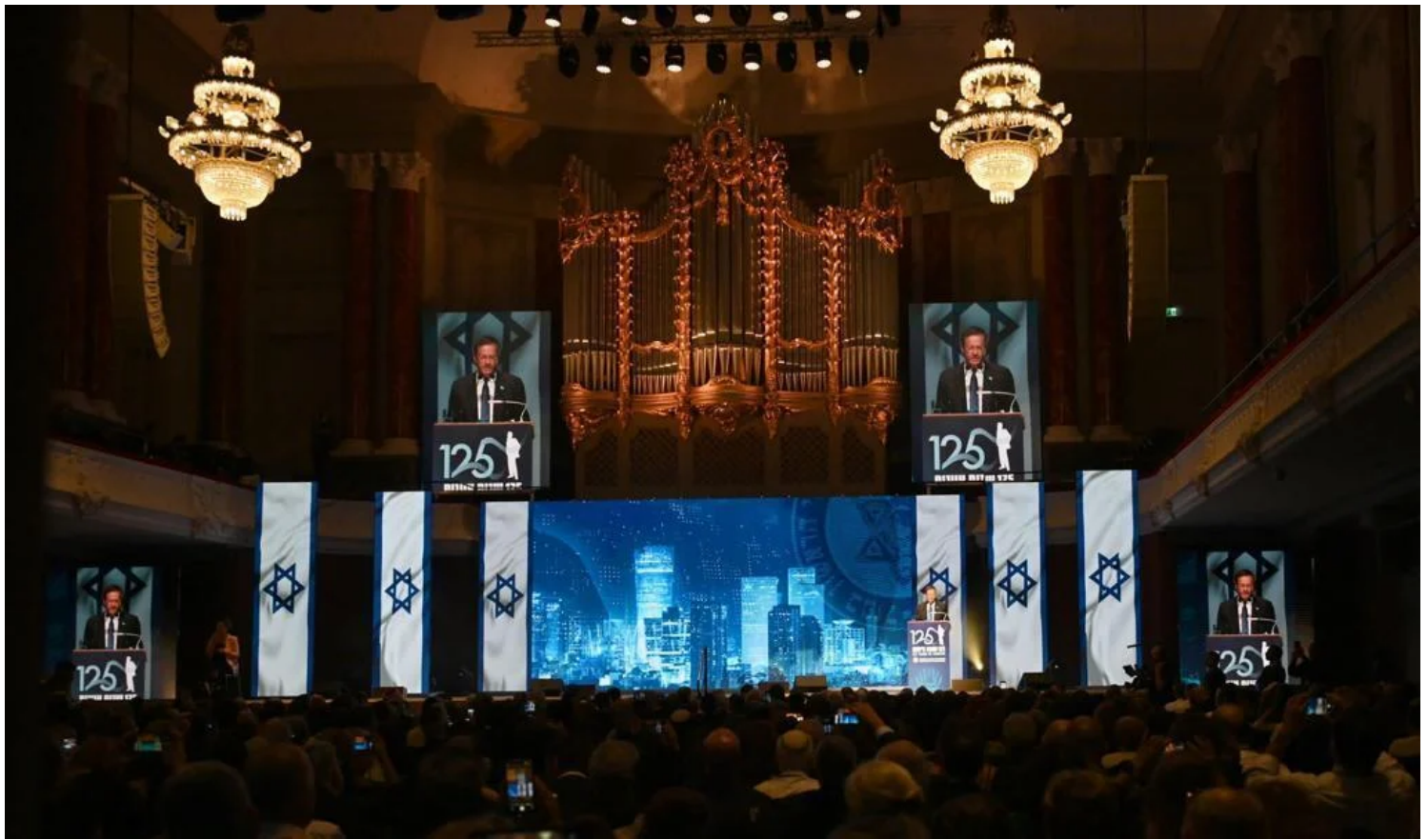
Shared Zionist values

For many of the delegates, the Zionist Congress taking place on the occasion of Israel's 75th Independence Day is far more than just a conference – it's taking part in the future of the State of Israel and connecting Israel to the diaspora in an extraordinary show of unity.

"Congresses have been held in four or five-year cycles since Herzl's first in 1897 but this extraordinary Congress has been convened around Israel's 75th," said Danny Lamm, the president of Executive Council of Australian Jewry who flew to Israel for the congress.

Lamm has been involved with the Zionist Congress since 1972, and prior to that, both his father and grandfather were delegates.

"The greatest value is in bringing global Zionist leadership to celebrate together, to share our individual and national challenges and for this congress to reinvigorate our efforts," said Lamm.



Opening session of the Zionist Congress at historic casino in Basel (Photo: World Zionist Organization, Courtesy)

Herbert Block, Executive Director of the American Zionist Movement, echoed the same sentiment emphasizing that this Congress, which has been delayed from meeting in person for three years due to the pandemic, is really a cause for celebration.

"Tying the Zionist Congress to this moment is important because last year we celebrated the 125th anniversary of Herzl's first Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897, now a few months later the 75th anniversary of the state of Israel, and it is really a momentous occasion."

It's all about dialogue

Perhaps the most unique feature of the Zionist Congress is that it brings together so many diverse communities with different challenges, but a common value of Zionism.

Block said that this year's conference is particularly focused on fostering dialogue. "There's been an effort by the WZO to have more dialogue and discussion rather than contentious debates...to lower the temperature on the debates that are going on in Israeli civil society and around the world," he said.

While there are resolutions that will be dealt with at this conference, it is clearly an opportunity to learn from communities around the world about a common cause.

"There are lessons to be learnt from these entirely different experiences, from Australasia, UK, European countries, South and Central Americas, Africa, Canada and the USA," said Lamm, adding that "I always believed



that what unites us is greater than what divides us. Our task is to focus on the main game of connecting Israel with our people and vice versa."

