

## **Good morning ladies and gentlemen,**

The Yiddish conference starting today is, beyond being a wonderful moment in itself, also part of the overall revival of the Yiddish culture.

For many years Yiddish seemed to have been a language in danger.

The language seemed to have been doomed to remain one of a sect - the Haredim (ultra orthodox), and thus an anathema for many secular Israelis and an enigma to many secular Jews around the world.

It seemed that Yiddish language and culture will not be able to withstand the assault of various historical forces as:

- The destruction of the Yiddish society in the Shoah.
- The rise of Hebrew as the language of the new Jew and the struggle to replace Yiddish with Hebrew as part of the shedding of the Galut.
- The passing away of the Yiddish speaking generation in the western world and the anti Jewish policies of the Soviet Union.

Still, in the last several years Yiddish is coming back:

- The number of Yiddish students in Israel is rising
- Yiddish theatre with Hebrew subtitles is flourishing in Israel and its founder Shmuel Atzmon is with us here today.
- New translation from Yiddish to Hebrew and to English of shalom Aleichem and others are awakening younger people in Israel to the world of the Yiddish.

Thus for me the conference today, and I thank B'nai-B'rith for working so hard to arrange it, is part of this growing movement.

We in the embassy of Israel to UNESCO strongly believe that the best way to fulfill the will of the martyrs and the survivors of the Shoah is to recreate their vanished world as much as possible.

We commemorate them every year in ceremonies, but making sure their world is alive is for me even more significant - the evil wishes of the Nazis will fail by resuscitating the world they thought they destroy.

Our support for having the conference in the UNESCO building is not coincidental.

The enemies of the Jewish people and Israel are trying to hijack this organization from its lofty ideals and make it an anti Israeli propaganda tool singling out Israel and concurrently ignoring all of their own outrageous violation of UNESCO's values.

Many are aghast at this and are trying to prevent it. I hope they will succeed.

Our support for having this conference in UNESCO is part of our message to those who are fighting against the destruction of UNESCO. We believe there is hope for the fight and are eager for it to succeed it may not be easy but it's extremely important-don't give it up!!

I wish to conclude on a personal note; I grew up in a home torn between the desire to rebuild Hebrew as the language of Zionism while being thoroughly part of the Yiddish world. Thus when I speak or write Hebrew today than, like my mother and grandmother, I use many many Yiddish idioms as part of my every day speaking and writing.

For me it is an integral part of my soul as much as the reading many of shalom Aleichem books - alas in Hebrew in the older and new translation.

I belong, heart and soul, to the world of Teveye the milkman and Motil Son Peissy who is familiar to many from fiddler on the roof.

We are all committed that the Shtetel world it's culture, humor, realism and sadness will remain with us forever. Thank you for organizing this conference.

Nimrod BARKAN, Israeli Ambassador to UNESCO