

A Reflection on Hanukkah

Hanukkah is the celebration of miracles and light, but it is also, at its core, a reminder of what it is to live life with different beliefs and practices than those around us.

Each Hanukkah we recall what our people experienced 2,000 years ago when Antiochus, the ruler of the Syrian kingdom, ordered Jews to stop practicing their religion and instead worship idols. We celebrate the Maccabees who, after fleeing to the wilderness, fought back and reestablished Jewish life.

But this victory was short lived. Throughout the centuries and the many countries in which our ancestors have lived, we have experienced religious persecution over and over again. Sometimes we have fled, sometimes we have resisted; always we have struggled to hold fast to our faith.

As we remember the plight of our people, we think of those who today are oppressed because of what they believe – the thousands of Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians, Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals, in Iran, Iraq, Eritrea, and many other countries around the world. Many have become refugees, some literally fleeing for their lives, because they too struggle to hold fast to their faith.

This Hanukkah, as we light the candles, let us commit to become modern day Maccabees, championing all peoples who wish to live according to their beliefs. Let us dedicate ourselves to one act that will help ensure that all people have the right – either in their homeland or in the new country in which they find refuge – to live in freedom and dignity.