

### Newsletter **Monday** June 1, 2015

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### Thousands show support for Israel at NYC parade

Traditional Israel Day Parade draws 40,000 participants and thousands of spectators, including Israeli and American dignitaries • "This is even more impressive at a time when there is enormous international pressure against Israel," says MK Ofir Akunis.

Yoni Hersch, The Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff



The Israel Day Parade marches along Fifth Avenue Sunday. Photo credit AP

Anyone walking around Manhattan on Sunday could have easily thought they had stumbled into Tel Aviv, as 40,000 people marched in the traditional Israel Day Parade along New York City's famous Fifth Avenue, as thousands of spectators watched.

This year, the display of support for Israel was even stronger as the city hosted the Celebrate Israel festival, the Israeli American Council's event featuring the best of Israeli innovation, Israeli foods, fashion shows by Israeli-American designers, and representatives from "Israel's hottest companies." According to the Israeli American Council, the event was "intended for American Jews, Israeli expats, and New Yorkers of all faiths, ethnicities, and walks of life."

As in previous years, the parade drew participants from some 200 communities and organizations, as well as community leaders and politicians, both Israeli and American. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer were in attendance, among others.

The Israeli delegation was headed by MK Ofir Akunis.

"This is a magnificent show of support. It is even more impressive at a time when there is enormous international pressure against us,"

Akunis told Israel Hayom.

MK Revital Swid, of the Zionist Union, also attended the parade.

"This parade is important amid our battle against delegitimization," she said. Fellow Zionist Union MK Ksenia Svetlova said, "This parade is the most beautiful thing there is."

There were, however, some dissonant spectators at the parade: Orthodox Jews who do not believe that Israel should exist. Standing near them at Sunday's celebration were other Orthodox men heckling gay marchers while hoisting signs that read, "Judaism considers male homosexuality a sin worse than murder."

But mostly New York's annual celebration of Israel was greeted by tens of thousands of spectators devoted to the Jewish state. As usual, security was especially tight for a parade that is a potential terrorist target, as are other prominent Jewish venues in New York City.

Meanwhile, the Celebrate Israel festival also drew thousands from New York and the vicinity. Most of the visitors at the festival were Israeli-Americans who got a taste of Israeli culture. Israeli singer Rita and Israeli children's entertainer Rinat Gabai performed at the festival.

"We wanted to reconnect the Israeli community to itself and to the Jewish community," said Yehudit Feinstein, the head of the IAC's New York chapter. The CEO of the organization, Sagi Balasha, said that history was made.

"This is the first time that a series of five festivals were organized in five American cities from coast to coast, where 50,000 people gathered to show support for Israel," he said. "It is very symbolic that while Israel is undergoing a delegitimization assault, the Israeli-American community organized an unprecedented show of support. This is an operation that cost \$2.5 million, most of it donated by Israeli-Americans."

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