



Balfour Declaration – 1917

Introduction: In one of the most significant decisions in the modern history of the Middle East, British Foreign Minister Arthur Balfour, speaking on behalf of his government, declared its support of an independent Jewish state in Palestine, which British troops had just captured from the Turks. The return of Jews to their ancestral home (the Zionist movement) was a cause that had gathered strength in the late 19th century as orchestrated persecution of Jewish communities (pogroms) spread throughout Europe. Jewish politicians in England, including Lord Rothschild, a prominent member of Parliament, had lobbied the British government for many years to support the Zionist cause. What later became known as the Balfour Declaration was this letter the Foreign Minister wrote to Rothschild in 1917, conveying the news that the British Cabinet had given its formal approval to a Jewish state. This was a controversial decision the moment it was made, because Palestine was already home to 600,000 Arabs who had lived there for centuries. The Balfour Declaration opened the door to waves of Jewish immigration to Palestine, and their arrival would create tension with the Arab community that would have profound consequences in the years to come.

November 2nd, 1917

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.

"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Yours sincerely,

Arthur James Balfour