

Opposition Demands Lieberman's Resignation

Members of Israel's opposition parties are calling for Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman to step down in the wake of Attorney General Yehuda Weinstein's decision to indict him for breach of trust and fraud.

On Friday, a day after Weinstein announced his decision, Meretz leader MK Zahava Gal-On led the charge by petitioning the High Court of Justice, as she said she would do on Thursday. In her petition, Gal-On cited past precedents and norms and asked that the court order Lieberman to step down as foreign minister

"Through a number of seminal rulings dealing with ethics in government, the High Court has set public norms in cases where a public official's actions smacked of moral turpitude and his service has been called into question," Gal-On wrote in her petition. "The inevitable conclusion ... is that letting the foreign minister hold on to his cabinet portfolio would send a clear and unequivocal message to Israeli citizens that the state's leadership and the heads of its judiciary are not troubled by acts of fraud or by the breach of the public's trust and may even think that public officials who commit such grave acts should be allowed to continue sitting at the cabinet table and lead the state."

Meretz cited past cases involving Shas ministers in the 1990s who stayed on the job despite their indictments but were forced to resign after the High Court intervened, as well as a case in which someone who was appointed as director-general in a government ministry was denied the post because of perceived corruption. In the latter case, the court said an "extra-stringent ethical standard should be applied in cases where the crimes in question hurt the very underpinnings of the

system while taking into account the fact that a person who is accused of such crimes would find it hard to project fairness, honesty, trust and candidness in the public limelight, making it incumbent to have him removed from office.”

Other opposition figures joined Meretz’s attacks on Thursday.

“Lieberman needs to leave his post,” Labor Chairwoman MK Shelly Yachimovich said. “If he won’t quit, then I call on (Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu to fire him immediately. If that does not happen, then Attorney-General Yehuda Weinstein needs to make the prime minister do it ... Lieberman cannot be allowed to stay in office for another minute.”

Labor released a statement following the indictment: “Labor will not accept allowing Lieberman to continue his term and will fight in every way possible to see justice served.”

Hatnuah Chairwoman Tzipi Livni and Yesh Atid Chairman Yair Lapid joined Yachimovich’s calls for Lieberman to quit.

Livni linked Lieberman’s recent widely publicized criticism of the EU to his ongoing trial.

“It’s now clear why Lieberman had his outbursts—he was trying to take attention away (from the case),” she said.

Labor MK Moshe Mizrahi, a retired police major-general and former head of investigations, commended the Israel Police for its work, though he voiced his concern about the case.

“The charges have been diluted significantly now that witnesses have begun vanishing,” he said. “Something here doesn’t feel right. I look at the behavior of the elected official (Lieberman), Bibi’s number two, and the youth we have today. They grow up in a violent and corrupt society and embrace this man. It’s time to put an end to this story, I have had enough of this Liebermanism trying to take over our lives.”

Hatnuah released a statement calling for Lieberman to “operate by the judicial norms in Israel and leave the government immediately.”

Yair Lapid said that the Yisrael Beytenu chairman cannot “stay in the government and represent Israel around the world after the attorney general has charged him with seriously harming and working against the public’s interests.”

Environmental Protection Minister Gilad Erdan (Likud) defended Lieberman, calling the indictment “only a small addendum in the case” and advising opposition parties to “be humane.”

MK Uri Ariel (New National Religious Party) called the indictment a “badge of shame for the attorney general and the Prosecution who have systematically worked to seal the fate of public officials for years. Weinstein needs to ask himself why he did not publish his decision two years ago when he vowed to do so, seeing as this (breach of trust and fraud) was his conclusion.”