



ISRAEL MATTERS!

Publication of the Israel Affairs Committee of Temple Beth Shalom
1809 Whitney Avenue, Hamden, CT 06517-1401



Issue Number 116
October 2017

Venezuelan Jews Fleeing Turmoil Get ‘Lifeline’ in Israel

Israeli Embassy in D.C. Shipped Tons of Aid to Hurricane Harvey Victims



After Hurricane Harvey devastated a large expanse of Texas, the Israeli Embassy to the United States

joined with two organizations to ship tons of aid to the storm’s victims. In partnership with the Israeli humanitarian aid organization IsraAid and Movers 495, a American-Israeli owned moving company, the embassy staff packed and loaded items into trucks to go directly to Houston. “We have been working closely with the Israeli consulate in Houston,” Itai Bar-Dov, a spokesperson for the Israeli embassy in Washington, told The Times of Israel. “They will be receiving the aid together with IsraAid and help with the distribution.”

IsraAid volunteers brought with them disaster management experts, mental health experts, and engineers. Once the hurricane wreaked calamitous damage throughout the state the embassy contacted IsraAid to see how they could help, according to Bar-Dov. “After receiving a list of items needed, specifically products for the rehabilitation and the cleanup of the damaged areas, we arranged for a large shipment of aid weighing several tons,” he said.

He went on to say their assistance is designed to not only provide material relief, but also send “a message to the people of Texas that ‘Israel stands with you.’” [Timesofisrael.com]

As the political and economic situation in Venezuela becomes increasingly unstable, Jews are fleeing the South American nation, with many choosing to immigrate to Israel. Conditions in Venezuela began deteriorating in 2013 following the death of the country’s former president, Hugo Chavez, and the ascension of his chosen successor Nicolas Maduro, a former bus driver.

During the past four years, inflation has skyrocketed under Maduro’s rule, leading to shortages in food and basic supplies such as medicine and toilet paper. Venezuelans stand in long lines—sometimes for 12 hours—just to obtain bare essentials. “There is no value to life right now in Venezuela,” Adele Tarrab, a Venezuelan Jew who moved to Israel with her family in 2015, told JNS.org. “I’ve actually seen people get killed for bread.”

Venezuela was once home to a thriving Jewish community, one of the largest in South America, with around 25,000 members in 1999. The crumbling economy caused many of the country’s Jews to flee, with the vast majority heading to Miami, Mexico and Panama. Some 9,000 Jews are believed to still reside in Venezuela. “We love Venezuela,” Tarrab said. “It’s a beautiful country. We still have family there, but they want to leave.”

Recently, a group of 26 new Venezuelan immigrants arrived in Israel, with the Israeli government and the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews (The Fellowship) facilitating their aliyah. The Fellowship says it is the only organization on the ground in Venezuela assisting the Jewish community with aliyah. During the past year and a half, the organization has brought 153 Venezuelan Jews to Israel, and has helped the immigrants obtain thousands of dollars in support to get on their feet.

“In the past four years we’ve seen a deterioration in the situation of the people of Venezuela,” The Fellowship’s founder and president, Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, told JNS.org. “Many of the olim (immigrants) that we have brought to Israel have not been able, literally, to put bread on the table.”

In addition to facilitating aliyah, The Fellowship aids elderly and less affluent Jews who remain in Venezuela, as the majority of wealthy members of the country’s Jewish community “already left for Miami” before the situation deteriorated, Eckstein said.

(Continued)

(Continued from page 1)

According to Eckstein, amid the lack of law and order in Venezuela, Jews are increasingly targeted for kidnappings by criminal gangs who hold them for ransom. "Since the Jewish community has this image of being more affluent due to stereotypes about Jews having money, kidnappings of Jewish community members are more common," he said.

Tarrab also noted the effects of anti-Semitic stereotypes about Jews and money in Venezuela. "It's like a jail. You don't leave your house because it's very dangerous to go out," she said, adding that the current trends in Venezuelan anti-Semitism began under Chavez's rule. Tarrab recalled a 2009 incident in which 15 armed attackers "broke into the main synagogue in Caracas" on a Friday night "and urinated on the Torah scrolls. It was shocking." The assailants scrawled anti-Semitic graffiti on the synagogue's walls and prevented the community from holding Friday night services. She also detailed an incident in which government forces confiscated the central gold market in Caracas. "Chavez knew that many of the stores were owned by the Jewish community. It was shocking and very sad," Tarrab said.

Venezuela's Jewish leaders don't want to present the current economic situation as a crisis, "but it really is," Eckstein said. "[The Fellowship] provides [Venezuelan Jews] with a lifeline to come to Israel ... and helps every step of the way ... most of them are coming literally with the shirts on their backs, no luggage," he said. Despite the "lifeline" of moving to Israel, Tarrab said the immigrants face many new challenges in the Jewish state. They are often frustrated by the lack of help from the Israeli government and encounter intense bureaucracy, which makes it hard for people who are trying to work in an honest way to have a better life, she said.

Soon after arriving in Israel, Tarrab and her family settled in the coastal city of Netanya and opened a restaurant, "Rustikana," that serves home-style Venezuelan food. The family regularly imports fresh kosher meat from South American countries such as Argentina to provide authentic flavors. The restaurant has become a local sensation and is often packed with Israelis who crave a taste of authentic South American cuisine. Although the restaurant is a very different business from the jewelry stores that the Tarrab family operated for decades in Caracas, the venture is fueled by a similar work ethic.

"My family and I came to Israel with 'con las ganas,' the willingness to do whatever it takes to succeed," said Tarrab. "You cannot come to Israel with the same mentality we had in Venezuela ... every day is challenging," she said. "Every day I have to fight, I am always on the defensive. It's tiring, but I love Israel ... I feel safe here, and I feel like this is my country." [JPost.com]

IDF Appoints First Colonel of Ethiopian Descent



Dr. Avi Yitzhaki, the chief medical officer of the Southern Command, recently became the first Israeli of Ethiopian descent to be promoted to the rank of colonel in the IDF. Col. Yitzhaki received his new

rank from IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gadi Eisenkot, [photo, above] who noted the special occasion. "Every officer being promoted (to colonel) brings with him or her a contribution of over 20 years of service. They each have their own unique contribution and story, and yet Col. Avi Yitzhaki is a trailblazer," Eisenkot said. "I congratulate you. To me, this promotion expresses the great appreciation of all you've done so far."

"Blessed are You, Lord, who has sustained us and enabled us to reach this occasion," Yitzhaki said. "I'm very excited and happy for myself and my family for the new rank and this wonderful achievement. I have no doubt my children, teenagers in general, and teenagers from the Ethiopian community in particular, will see this as a realization of the phrase, 'If you will it, it is no dream.'"

Dr. Yitzhaki is in charge of the Southern Command's medical unit. Yitzhaki, married and a father of four from Be'er Sheva, was born in Ethiopia and made aliyah to Israel in 1994 at the age of 19. His parents made aliyah before him, in 1981. Upon his arrival to Israel, he began preparing for the university entry exams to continue his medical studies, which he began in Addis Ababa at the age of 16 after skipping several grades. He continued his medical studies at Ben-Gurion University and then underwent basic training, army medics' course, and officers' course while finishing his PhD in medicine. Upon completing his doctorate degree, he was stationed at his request in the Paratroopers Brigade's 101st Battalion as a medical officer. Later, he served as a doctor in the elite Maglan Special Forces unit.

During the 2006 Second Lebanon War, Yitzhaki was a resident in general surgery and was called up to serve as a doctor in the Nahal Brigade. Twelve hours before fighting ended, Yitzhaki suffered a shrapnel injury and had to undergo surgery. During the 2008-9 Operation Cast Lead, Yitzhaki served as the head of the Medical Department in the Southern Command. He also served as a surgeon at a field hospital as part of the IDF's humanitarian delegation to Haiti following the 2010 earthquake.

Later, he served as the head medical officer of the Gaza Division during the 2012 Operation Pillar of Defense and 2014 Operation Protective Edge. Following this, he was appointed the head of operational medicine in the Medical Corps. [Ynetnews.com]