

The Continuing Plight of Gaza and North Shomron Evacuees

It has been more than a year since the former residents of Gaza and four communities of the northern Shomron were evacuated from their homes. These committed and pioneering citizens settled their communities with the strong encouragement of successive governments, building towns, *yeshivot*, flourishing farms, and other infrastructure that were home to and otherwise served thousands of Israelis for dozens of years. These individuals were evicted from their homes with little appreciation for their visionary efforts and with inadequate procedures and preparation to compensate them as required.

As they seek to reestablish their lives, it is painful to see that many still remain without permanent housing, stable jobs or the resources necessary to fully rehabilitate themselves following the intense traumatic ordeals they experienced. With their communities, small businesses and farms destroyed, over a thousand evacuees remain unemployed and without sufficient resources to provide for their families and suffer from severe social and emotional disorders.

The Compensation Law has failed to provide the necessary compensation for property, housing, farms and businesses that each individual or family unit requires to be made whole. The government's application of the Compensation Law has excluded from aid those who may not meet every criterion for aid, but who nevertheless continue to suffer as victims of the Disengagement. Furthermore, the government has to date not made the rehabilitation of the evacuees a national priority, and has not coalesced the relevant government ministries and agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations such as the Jewish Agency and Jewish National Fund, to work effectively together to avoid bureaucratic red tape and the painful delays in implementation that are currently prevalent.

Work on the permanent communal solutions – their planning, approval and laying of infrastructure - has been painfully slow, if progressing at all. Evacuees are still in cramped temporary housing, unable to begin their future lives. And because of these extensive delays, evacuees now fear that aid and services will be cut off before they resettle properly in their permanent dwellings.

The government's post-Disengagement efforts lacked appropriate emphasis on preserving the former communities in planning for both temporary and permanent housing solutions. Mental health professionals have placed great importance on members of the evacuated communities maintaining the bonds established in their former communities, and the government has insufficiently and only belatedly addressed this. The Disengagement process has engendered a feeling of betrayal among the former Gaza and north Shomron residents, particularly among the youth, who feel frustrated and alienated from the State.

We are pained by these circumstances and remain committed to raising concern about the plight of the Gaza and northern Shomron evacuees with relevant government officials and agencies until their status is fully resolved.

Accordingly, we resolve that:

- The Orthodox Union shall continue to reach out to our constituent communities to provide assistance for direct financial aid, provisions for Jewish holidays, cultural activities, summer camps and other youth programs, subsidies for salaries for social welfare workers, and other material and spiritual requirements until the evacuees' needs are met and they are fully acclimated with their new reality. The Orthodox Union shall use available infrastructure and resources of the Seymour J. Abrams OU Israel World Center to provide programming and support as appropriate.
- The Orthodox Union shall continue to advocate in the Jewish umbrella organizations in which we sit to raise awareness regarding the plight of the Gaza and northern Shomron evacuees and seek necessary support for them.
- The Orthodox Union shall advocate in its meetings with Israeli government officials for the full compensation and rehabilitation of the Gaza and North Shomron evacuees,

requesting in its discussions that the Government of Israel declare the rehabilitation of the Gaza and northern Shomron evacuees a national mission of appropriate priority; allow for appropriate flexibility in the compensation law to provide the necessary compensation for property, housing, farms and businesses that each individual or family unit requires to be made whole; encourage the preservation of communal ties and appropriate support to rejuvenate the evacuees' once rich communal lives; work to address the alienation – especially in the evacuated youth - caused by Disengagement to help heal societal rifts; and continue to provide aid and services to the evacuees until they have sufficiently settled in permanent dwellings.