



Summary of Second Meeting

Emergency Situation in Israel's South

Held Tuesday, January 6, 2009, 10 Tevet 5769, Ministry of Defense, Tel Aviv

The National Emergency Forum (RACHEL) for Israel's south met for the second time on Tuesday, January 6, 10 Tevet 5769, in the conference room of the Ministry of Defense in Tel Aviv. Leading the discussion were Matan Vilnai, deputy Minister of Defense, and Zev Tzuk-Ram, director of National Emergency Services in the Ministry of Defense. Representatives from nearly 20 central agencies and 10 government offices participated in the meeting. The discussion focused on the work of the social/civic agencies and their understanding of the situation and needs in the field.

At the beginning of the meeting, the deputy Minister briefed those in attendance on the military operation in Gaza. He highlighted the importance of planning for the realities of continued military action over the next 10 days, assessing the extent to which both the government and the social agencies are prepared to continue their work. He also said that, for the time being, with the exception of certain cases, there is no reason why the citizens in these effected regions should sit in bomb shelters on a permanent basis. Work should be done to create a normal life routine, and entrance into bomb shelters as necessary.

A representative of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews (IFCJ) acknowledged the government's work on the frontlines and the collaborative inter-population efforts. He also updated that the IFCJ has allocated a budget for the use of local welfare ministries. A representative of the United Jewish Communities (UJC) stated that \$10 million had been allocated by the Executive of the UJC for designated relief projects. The representative of the Jewish Agency praised the willingness of the Israeli business community that

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is supporting the activities. The Joint Distribution Committee representative pointed out the involvement of youth and teens in the ongoing efforts.

A number of participants said that it is necessary to direct specific assistance to the residents of the city of Ofakim. A Jewish Agency representative said that there is a feeling of “suffocation” among the children who are living within a 7 km radius of Gaza, who have been spending their days in shelters and protected buildings. He also mentioned that in several communities there was a problem with the air raid sirens. Deputy Minister Vilnai updated that the IDF is working to address and fix these problems.

A number of participants mentioned that the “distance learning” program initiated by the Ministry of Education is progressing at an impressive rate, but there is still a lack of computers in many communities. The Ministry of Education’s representative mentioned that the Ministry has an exact list of the needs in each of the communities, and suggested that any further work in this area be coordinated with the Ministry’s central offices. A representative of “Matan” updated that 2,000 computers were distributed as part of the national “A Computer for Every Child” program, and that the Bezeq telephone company has offered subsidized hi-speed internet connections for these computers. Jewish Agency representative said that both the Jewish Agency and the UJC were working to facilitate addressing this need as well. Deputy Minister Vilnai underscored the need to coordinate these efforts and ensure the computer distribution is done based on documented actual need.

The Good Spirit representative updated on the topic of volunteer activities and matching volunteers with local needs in coordination with RACHEL, Tehila, and the local municipalities. According to him, there are more volunteers than necessary and that the call-in centers are overwhelmed with offers to help. Most of the volunteer work is done in the shelters, in respite activities for the



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children, and assistance to local municipal workers. He also mentioned that there are several volunteer centers that are working in parallel, a reality that might create repetition. The representative of the Civic Services in the Prime Ministers Office reported that a volunteer center does not exist in every community. JDC representative said that she will forward a list of contact people for contributions, volunteers, visits, and hosting in several communities in which they are actively working with the mayor and local municipalities.

Representative of Frontline Command mentioned that soldiers are assisting the 106 call centers and working to distribute supplies in bomb shelters. Shatil representative mentioned that there are certain populations, i.e. new immigrants and elderly, to which Frontline Command is not able to convey messages effectively. In response, deputy Minister said that the matter should be handled by Souther Frontline Command. The need for coordinated information between the agencies and the local municipalities was reiterated. The "Matan" representative said that when they answer a need and provide assistance they update the civilian desk of the RACHEL offices.

A number of participants raised the question of dealing with special-needs and handicapped populations. A representative of the Fight for the Disabled updated on a significant improvement in the response to this population since the last meeting. Nevertheless, there is still no clear directive regarding the directives for removing these individuals from their homes and those working in the field are having a hard time finding the resources to take action in this regard. Vilnai said that the government's position is to relocate any individual who is interested in being relocated. He mentioned that a portion of this population is not interested in being relocated. Izzy Shapira representative said that 12 organizations in Renana created a joint venue for assisting this population. A further discussion of this issue will be held as part of the National Emergency Services meetings.



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Questions were also raised about transportation to respite activities. The director of National Emergency Services updated that there is a full transportation system operated by the Ministry of Defense that uses school buses to take children out of the line of fire. Immediate action is being taken by the Ministry of Defense together with the National Nature and Parks Service to offer further respite. It was also mentioned that there is room for extensive inter-agency work on this matter. Another matter mentioned was the way in which assistance to the Arab sector is being handled, including in the village of Rahat. The representative of the Israel Trauma Coalition said that she has received requests from program implementers seeking assistance and respite for employees and directors, as well as youth movements and emergency response teams.

Representative from Latet (*To Give*), that distributes food to the elderly during times of peace, said that a minimal need was identified in the south of the country, but a growing need for meals for families who are hosting southern residents in the center of the country. The organization distributed games to children, as well as blankets and heating units for the elderly. The Ezer M'Zion representative mentioned that the organization has distributed 1,300 meals a day to residents from the south who are currently residing in the center of the country. A number of participants also mentioned the immediate need to feed the volunteers. Sachta Rashi representative said that they will consider the possibility of assisting in this matter. It was added the they operate the national food service, and thus has expertise in this realm of activity. Also reported a pilot program to renovate 30 shelters in the line of fire.





At the wrap up of the discussion, the deputy Minister said that there are four central realms of activity that are worthy of attention in the coming days:

1. Respite activities for children and youth, removing them from the range of fire in coordination with the transportation system set up by the Ministry of Defense.
2. Individualized attention and assistance for people with special needs, in coordination with welfare offices and agencies working to relocate those who are interested in being relocated.
3. Increased efforts to distribute computers to every child and facilitate the distance learning opportunities.
4. Distribution of supplies for bomb shelters in collaborative houses in addition to the government and army efforts to do so in public shelters.

The deputy Minister said that a directive document will be distributed along with these minutes and said that while there is a desire for inter-agency and cross-ethnic coordination, there are certain realms of activity in which it is not possible.



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Government Response and Policy

Issue	Response
Shelters and Supplies	The government, together with Frontline Command and the Ministry of Defense, is renovating and supplying public bomb shelters; erecting “safe spots” as needed, and is using soldiers in Frontline Command for these purposes. Specific needs are handled on a need-basis and a specific budget for this purpose was forwarded to the municipalities. Private shelters, in which the government has a hard time working, there is opportunity for social agencies to take action.
Food Allocations	In the previous meeting it was stated that since most of the population is not confined to bomb shelters for prolonged periods of time, <u>it is not necessary to provide organized meals for the residents.</u> Nevertheless, there is a need for meals for volunteers.
Children and Youth	<p>Due to the fact that academic institutions are closed, the Ministry of Education is operating a distance learning program. Over the last few years, thousands of computers have been distributed throughout these communities through “A Computer for Every Child.” With the increased need there is a lack of computers in several homes. On the government level, the matter is being handled by the Ministry of Education.</p> <p>Additionally, work is being done to assist in the shelters, several inter-agency efforts have gotten underway to facilitate educational activities during this time. <u>The government is encouraging these type of programs and is assisting to the extent possible and necessary.</u></p>
Assistance for Special Needs Populations	Over the past several days, efforts have been made to relocate people with special needs and the elderly to locations out of the range of fire, as part of pre-conceived plans of the Ministries of Health and Welfare. <u>The government’s position is to handle these cases on an individual basis, according to need.</u> Efforts are being made to operate the special education facilities, to the extent possible according to the security situation.
Local Municipalities	In the previous meeting it was stated that the local municipality is the cornerstone of handling the crisis in these frontline populations. All efforts are focused on assisting the municipalities and working together. Ministry of Interior allocated funds to the municipalities for these emergency purposes.
Daily Respite Activities	The Ministry of Defense is assisting in arranging respite activities for children (specifically in the form of transportation). Hundreds of buses of children have been sent on one-day reprieve trips. <u>The government</u>



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	<u>encourages these outings.</u>
Relocation	<u>The government believes that there is NO current need for relocation of citizens.</u> As needed, and on an individual basis, the Ministries of Health and Welfare and the social service agencies are handling the needs for relocation of people with special needs.
Financial Assistance	The Minister and Ministry of Finance are working to establish the comprehensive compensation for residents in the line of fire; Bank of Israel has notified residents of the region about special consideration for cases of “overdraft.” The Accountant General is offering special assistance for homeowners with mortgages and government subsidies.



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