

# KKL-JNF MOBILIZES ON BEHALF OF THE RESIDENTS OF THE SOUTH

At least 1,300 people were murdered, 3,000 wounded and about 200 abducted to Gaza as a result of the murderous Hamas terror attack that shocked the entire world. The victims included children, women and the elderly - this cruel enemy has no compassion for anyone. About 60,000 residents of Southern Israel were forced to leave their homes, becoming refugees in their own country. Many people volunteered to help residents from the south who had experienced the most horrific acts that the human mind could ever imagine.

With the help of its friends from all around the world, KKL-JNF has been supporting the communities on the Gazan border for many years. Needless to say, now, too, KKL-JNF is part of the national effort to care for the residents of southern Israel who have been forced to evacuate their homes and hosts them in a safe and secure environment far away from



*Photographed by Yoav Devir*

the line of fire. It's not just about providing them with a bed and a hot meal – KKL-JNF also organizes organizational activities for children along with relaxing activities for the entire family.

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Along with hosting families, KKL-JNF is promoting a series of important initiatives for the security of the southern residents, including the installation of mobile bomb shelters, the purchase of defense equipment for emergency teams and the purchase of ambulances.

With KKL-JNF's help, dozens of families from Moshav Tekuma in the south were lodged at a hotel on the shores of Lake Kinneret. **Racheli Chochma**, a mother of three, recalled the terrible events: "We woke up on Saturday morning to the sound of the sirens, but to tell the truth, we weren't so bothered by it, because we're already used to it. We quickly went into our home secure room, and after a while, we began to understand that something unusual was going on. We closed all the doors and windows and stayed in the secure room for over twenty-four hours, all the time hearing the sounds of shooting and explosions around us."

The next morning, the entire family, together with the other members of the moshav, received a directive to evacuate to the north. "We left without any idea of where we were going," Racheli said. "For a few days we went from place to place, until we were invited by KKL-JNF to stay at this hotel together with our entire community. It's really



*Photographed by Yoav Devir*

important that the whole community is together and can support each other. The children play with their friends, they take part in social activities, and we're all beginning to recover from what happened."

**Meytar Simkovich**, who is also from Tekuma, arrived at the hotel with her two children. She is in the ninth month of her pregnancy, and only last week her family moved into their new house, which had just finished being built. "Even the secure room wasn't in order or ready for use," Meytar said.

On that terrible day, her husband Elkana left the family in the secure room and went out to defend the moshav. "These were the most stressful hours I had ever

experienced in my entire life," Meytar said. Thankfully, Elkana is healthy and well, as are all the other members of the community.

"It's really good that we're here now with all of our community rather than being separate from each other in different places all over Israel," Meytar added. "It enables us to support and strengthen each other. The children are enjoying themselves and they can just be children."

Counselors from KKL-JNF's Education and Community Division were at the pastoral hotel in order to lead fun educational activities that helped create group cohesion. The children solved riddles, ran around the yard from one activity station to another, learned about Israel's geography on a giant map and had a great time with a huge paraglider.

"We're doing whatever we can for these children, who experienced many long hours of horror and fear," said KKL-JNF Northern Region Education and Community Director **Danny Fadida**. **Haim Katz**, a counselor, said that "just like everyone else in Israel, we also mobilized to help the communities in the south during



*Photographed by Rami Chahma*

these difficult times. We keep the children busy with content that teaches them about the land of Israel and also develops love of the country."

Not too far away, at Moshav Hispin in the Golan Heights, KKL-JNF is hosting additional families from communities on the Gazan Border and the south. KKL-JNF counselors organized educational and relaxing activities for the children, and at the end of the day, everyone came together for a particularly moving ceremony to welcome the Shabbat with music and song. When the time came to sing "What is most important is not to be afraid at all", the voices sounded especially strong and determined.

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"We came here after a particularly difficult week and after wandering from place to place for a few days," said **Keren Kalfa**. "We're resting, venting, meeting other people who had terrible experiences like ours, and in the meantime, the kids are enjoying the open spaces and the quiet."

"We came here for some quiet and rest for our children and for us," said **Snir Aharoni** from Sderot in the south. "We stayed for a few days with my parents, but there too there were sirens and warnings about terrorist infiltrations. We were looking for a place where the kids could go outside without worrying, and we're really enjoying it here."

**Itiel Biton** from Netivot came to Hispin after he and his family had been closed in their secure room for an entire week. "We have four little children, and we all felt totally claustrophobic already. Getting a break from all this is so important, I'm really grateful to KKL-JNF for this initiative."

"We don't take it for granted that KKL-JNF is doing all this for us," added **Meytar Simkovich**. "A lot of people in Israel and all over the world want to help, and this is a very moving example of how everyone in our nation feels responsible for everyone else."



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*Be a partner to KKL-JNF's efforts on behalf of Israel's population at this time of emergency. KKL-JNF is grateful to the countries that have already contributed towards alleviating the condition of the residents from the south. If you haven't already, please join them now!*