



## ***War in the North: Jewish Agency Support for the Galilee's Non-Jewish Population***

### ***Introduction***

In September 2005, Israel's population stood at some 7 million people: 5.6 million Jews and 1.4 million non-Jews (Arabs, Druze, Circassians). The non-Jewish sector makes up 20 percent of the population of the country as a whole, but a far higher percentage in the Central Galilee area. This includes such Arab and Druze towns as Tarshiha, Nazrat, Kfar Kana, Tamra, Sakhnin and Shfaram, as well as a large rural population. In this part of Israel, over 65 percent of the population belong to the country's non-Jewish sector, nearly 400,000 people.

### ***Background: Jewish Agency programs for non-Jewish minorities in Israel***

For a number of years already, the Jewish Agency has been supporting and implementing programs that reach out to the country's non-Jewish minorities in the fields of education, co-existence, small business development and health.

**Education:** For example, Net@, a program for high-school pupils to encourage technological and social excellence, reaches out to the non-Jewish population in the mixed towns in which it operates – Acre, Nazrat, Ramle and the Misgav area of the Galilee. Similarly, Atidim, a joint project of the Israel Defense Forces, Keren Rashi, the Education Ministry and the Jewish Agency, which is working to close social gaps in Israel by identifying talented and motivated disadvantaged high school youth from the periphery and providing them with enrichment programs that will help them compete for the prestigious IDF's academic deferred service track and study at university, is open to those minority groups that serve in the army – Druze and Bedouins.

**Co-existence:** Through the Allocations Unit, grass-roots organizations that deal with co-existence and mutual understanding have been funded since 1999. Over the past six years, the Jewish Agency has allocated some \$1 million to projects that have reached out to over 100,000 people – about half Jews and half non-Jews. Most of the projects work with school-age children and consist of joint encounters and activities within an informal, supplementary educational framework.

**Small Business Development:** the Jewish Agency helped establish the Small Business Development Center in Yarka that helps the Druze community of the Galilee.

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The Jewish Agency for Israel is a nonprofit funded by communities and donors throughout the world.



*Partnership 2000:* Co-existence activities are also implemented within the framework of P2K, as per initiatives and decisions of the steering committees of each partnership region. Recent projects include helping improve the commercial success of Acre's old city market and its Arab vendors.

*Health:* the partnership between the Jewish Agency and the Cleveland Jewish Federation that seeks to address the issue of women's health in Israel, Isha, reaches out to women in the non-Jewish sector also through courses on proper exercise, nutrition and health awareness.

***War in the North: Support for the non-Jewish Population***

The katyushas that rained on the Galilee during the 33 days of hostilities did not distinguish between Jews and non-Jews, and indeed, a number of the civilian casualties came from the country's minority population groups. The residents of the Galilee's non-Jewish towns and villages were, along with their Jewish neighbors, compelled to spend long days and hours in air raid shelters and safe rooms.

Similarly, the Jewish Agency's response to the war and its support for the civilian population of the north reached out to all sectors of the Galilee's citizens, Jews and non-Jews alike.

***Summer Camps:*** during the war we provided relief and respite from the rockets for over 34,000 youngsters, aged 8-18, from throughout the north in summer camps in the center and the south of the country. Of these participants, about 3,000 came from 40 towns and villages whose residents are members of Israel's minority population groups.

***Equipment for air-raid shelters and safe rooms:*** as part of our wide-ranging efforts to install air conditioning units, fans, televisions and emergency lighting in air raid shelters and safe rooms in the north, for which \$1.5 million funds was donated by UJC and synagogues throughout North America, we provided this equipment to 80 shelters in 15 towns whose residents are members of Israel's minority population groups. The equipment helped improve the basic conditions in the shelters, in which people were forced to spend long hours, and particularly helped amuse and occupy the shelters' younger generation.

***Equipment for community centers:*** we are focusing on community centers in six Arab and Druze towns in the Galilee – Majdal Krum, Hurfeish, Shibli, Daburiyya, Maghar and Gush Halav – which were recently built with funding from the Housing Ministry but which were standing empty because there was no budget to equip them with furniture or fittings that would enable them to function as community centers.

The Jewish Agency has undertaken to equip these centers fully, including office furniture and chairs for the central hall where events will take place; computers and audio visual systems to be used in activities. The budget for this is \$300,000. The work has already begun and should be completed by mid-September.



**Days of Fun:** Much of the non-Jewish population was reluctant to send their younger generation to residential camps in the center and south of the country, but to ensure that the children and youth nonetheless have a rest from the tension of the war and the rockets, we developed day-long excursions that combined visiting places of interest in Israel with rest and relaxation. Though the ceasefire seems to have ended the war, we are continuing with this project, and hope that by the end of August and the beginning of the new school year, as many as 10,000 youngsters from Israel's minority population in the north of the country will have enjoyed these day outings. Some 6,000 youth have already participated in this program.

**Family Centers:** Until the school year begins we are operating family activity centers in a number of the towns in the north, where children and parents together can do a variety of activities, recover from the trauma of the war and prepare for the school year that will begin in early September. Centers in Acre and Haifa are reaching out to the cities' Jewish and non-Jewish populations. The centers are open throughout the day.

**Preparation for Studies:** In a program developed and organized by the Education Ministry, we are reaching out to the primary and junior high school population in 42 non-Jewish towns and villages in the north. Activities that will take place throughout the week beginning August 27 in schools and informal educational frameworks will reach out to tens of thousands of youngsters and help them prepare for the new school year.

**Young Leadership Development:** In a program in which the Jewish Agency is working together with the Abraham Fund, we will be reaching out to the young leadership, of primary and junior high school age, in the mixed Jewish and non-Jewish towns of Acre, Ma'alot Tarshiha and Haifa with three weeks of special enrichment activities that will begin in the last week of the school holidays and continue during the first two weeks of school. The program will reach out to some 30,000 young people, and includes a focus on community work, such as helping rebuild and repair damaged public buildings, as well as informal educational activities.

**Financial Investment:** Through all these activities the Jewish Agency is currently investing over \$6 million in helping the non-Jewish population in the north.