

Memphis Jewish Federation Responds to Israel Forest Fire Crisis

MEMPHIS, TN, December 3, 2010--The Jewish Federations of North America, including Memphis Jewish Federation, and their overseas partners The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and The Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) are mobilizing on the ground in Israel in response to the massive forest fires raging in the north.

Memphis Jewish Federation is responding to this crisis by opening an emergency mailbox for the Israel Forest Fire Disaster Relief Fund. 100% of all donations will be directed to victims and their families. Memphis Jewish Federation will absorb all administrative costs. Checks can be made out to Memphis Jewish Federation with "Forest Fire Relief" written in the memo line and mailed to MJF at 6560 Poplar Ave. Germantown, TN 38138.

JAFI is working with youth movements to open camps for displaced children on Friday; to make up to 1,000 shelter beds available for displaced families; and to begin outreach to victim families.

JDC's Emergency Response Team was activated, working with local Israeli authorities to monitor the situation, especially focused on the most vulnerable including the elderly.

JFNA has also created a special resource page <http://www.jewishfederations.org/page.aspx?id=234891> that includes news stories and other resources, and it will be updated as more information becomes available.

The fires, which began outside the Druze village of Usfiya on Thursday morning after a major heat wave, spread across the Carmel Mountain region and sent massive plumes of thick smoke into the sky. Thousands of people were forced to evacuate and dozens died when they were trapped in the flames.

Several kibbutzim and villages, including Nir Etzion, Ein Hod, Ein Hid and Beit Oren and the Druze village of Isfiyah, as well as the Carmel Forest Hotel, were evacuated Thursday afternoon. Haifa University was also evacuated. Tragically, a bus carrying 40 wardens to the Damon Prison near Kibbutz Beit Oren to help evacuate Israeli and Palestinian prisoners was engulfed in wind-driven flames and the passengers died instantly. The head of Haifa Police, Deputy Commander Ahuva Tomer, was critically burned and rushed to Rambam Medical Center.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited a forward command center in Haifa, and called the fire "unprecedented." He was quoted in the Jerusalem Post as saying, "We have never known a tragedy of this scope." Prime Minister Netanyahu said the focus was on keeping people out of the fire zone and extinguishing the blaze. Greece, Cyprus and Spain were sending firefighting aircraft in response to appeals, he said, while Israel continue to speak with officials in Jordan, Russia and elsewhere for support.

Defense Minister Ehud Barak mobilized Israeli troops to assist firefighting efforts as well. Netanyahu said he would convene his Cabinet Friday morning to brief them on the crisis.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Memphis Jewish Federation at 901-767-7100.