

Operation “Tzur Yisrael” from Ethiopia

The First Phase of the “Tzur Yisrael” Ethiopian Immigration Operation has Concluded At this point in time, 316 new Olim from Ethiopia landed in Israel, and another 80 immigrants will join them tomorrow morning, as part of Operation “Tzur Yisrael”. The Olim are traveling together with the Minister of Aliyah and Integration, who is also returning from Ethiopia after flying there to closely monitor preparations for the Aliyah.

The operation is a joint collaboration between the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, the Chairman of the Jewish Agency, Yitzhak (Buzi) Herzog, and the Ministry of the Interior.

As part of Government Resolution 429, to further the bringing home to Israel of Ethiopian Jews, the first phase was successfully concluded this morning. According to the outline formulated by the Minister of Aliyah and Integration and approved as early as October 2020, by the beginning of the year, about 2,000 immigrants, who have been waiting for decades to immigrate to Israel and meanwhile are being housed in transit camps, will arrive in Israel.

The Minister of Aliyah and Integration, Pnina Tamano Shata stated: “I embarked on a week-long journey to try to bridge the decades-long gap of thousands of remnants of Ethiopian Jewry left behind after Operation Shlomo and other government resolutions. Those waiting to immigrate to fulfill, on the one hand, the dream of Israel and Jerusalem and on the other hand, request the most basic premise of reuniting with members of their families.

It is not simple. It was complex and precarious for me to see many of the community who are waiting to emigrate, while living in a state of malnutrition, poverty and great difficulties. Literally life is on hold! It is not an easy matter to receive phone calls from very elderly mothers, who plead to bring to Israel their children who have been left behind, whom they have not seen for many years and who have so far not been permitted to emigrate to Israel. The case is frequently one or two sons left behind when the rest of the family and children are here in the country.

I am optimistic! I believe! We, as a society, will do everything and quickly resolve the all too painful, human issue that has been ongoing for too many years.

I consider this Operation “Tzur Yisrael” as one of the best deeds and one of the best Government resolutions taken by the unity Government. A moment above the controversies and debates, a moment of saving lives, of people, and especially a moment of national duty that reminds us who we are as a people who were privileged to return home after thousands of years of exile. Am Yisrael Chai!”

The Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, stated: “I do not remember being so emotional for many years, by such a refined Zionist occurrence, which expresses our entire significance. My wife Sarah and I stood there with tears in our eyes at the reception, when we saw the new olim, our Ethiopian Jewish brothers, disembark from the aircraft carrying baskets - as we remember, as I remember from my childhood - disembarking,



Top: Ethiopian Olim arriving in Israel’s Ben Gurion airport on an Ethiopian Airlines jet. They were greeted by Israeli Minister of Aliyah and Absorption, by the head of the Jewish Agency and by Israeli dignitaries. Bottom: Members of the Falash Mura community attend morning prayer services in the synagogue in Gondar, Ethiopia, back in 2016. Photo: Miriam Alster/Flash90

touching the ground, the Land of Israel. The mother kisses the ground and carries a baby named Jerusalem, and another baby named Esther. Esther and Jerusalem are coming to Jerusalem - this is the essence of the Jewish story, this is the essence of the Zionist story. Therefore, we, our dear brothers and sisters, Ethiopian olim, we are so excited to welcome you here. Welcome to the Land of Israel, welcome to the State of Israel.

You arrived on a direct flight from Gondar - parents and children. I have seen photos of you holding pictures of your relatives living here in Israel, whom you long to see, and they long to see you – and now comes this wonderful family reunion.

You have been waiting a long time for the dream to come true, and today it is coming true.”

Prime Minister Netanyahu added: “In the interactions that I am having, together with the National Security Headquarters, with the Sudanese government, interactions for normalization and peace, I requested to allow the families to reach the sites in Sudan where their loved ones perished. We are making progress in these moves.”

The Minister of Defense, Benny Gantz stated: “We are today realizing the Zionist vision in its purest sense – the ingathering of exiles. You, who stand at the gates of this country, carry on your backs a

wonderful tradition of thousands of years, and it is the duty of the State of Israel to ensure your optimal integration and an equal opportunity to begin your new life here. Despite the raging Corona virus pandemic, it is very important that you come here now and that we learn the lessons from the integration processes of the past.”

Gantz added: “Of late, I have conducted a security assessment of the dangers as a result of the situation in northern Ethiopia and its consequences for the other Falashmura community waiting to immigrate to Israel. We will examine how we can accelerate the Aliyah of all those waiting and, as required, we will be able to move them to safe areas.”

The Chairman of the Jewish Agency, Yitzhak (Buzi) Herzog stated: “This is a very exciting moment to see the first aircraft loaded with new Olim in the current Operation “Tzur Yisrael” Aliya from Ethiopia. Later on, all 2,000 immigrants will take part in a mass airlift and will be reunited in Israel with their families, who have been waiting years for their arrival. Entire families have longed and prayed for this moment for many years as they sat in the transit camps in Addis Ababa and Gondar in Ethiopia, as did their relatives in Israel. I congratulate the Minister of Aliyah and Integration, Pnina Tamano Shata, who has rounded off an exciting circle by traveling in the first aircraft.

The Jewish Agency together with the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration and the Ministry of the Interior, have been preparing for weeks, both in Israel and on Ethiopian soil, for this moment to carry out Operation “Tzur Yisrael”, as determined by the Government Resolution last October and now we see it coming alive.”

The olim landing this morning at Ben Gurion Airport is the opening salvo for the Aliyah of the others waiting to emigrate to Israel. In parallel, the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration and the Jewish Agency continue to work amongst the community waiting in Ethiopia, including taking care of medical aspects, involving thorough medical accompaniment and a daily feeding program for children and for pregnant and lactating women.

The immigrants will enter isolation in accordance with the procedure for the arrival of immigrants from around the world and will then be reunited with their families waiting for them in Israel. The Ministry of Aliyah and Integration and the Jewish Agency have geared up for their integration upon the completion of the isolation period, in integration centers throughout the country.

Since the State of Israel was established, 3.3 million new olim were brought to Israel by the Israeli Government and with the help of the Jewish Agency, about 95,000 of which were olim from Ethiopia. In the mid 1980s, about 8,000 Ethiopian olim arrived in Israel through Operation Moshe by way of Sudan. In Operation Shlomo, conducted in 1991, about 14,000 Ethiopian olim arrived by mass airlift. In the summer of 2013, the Jewish Agency completed Operation Wings of the Dove, in which about 7,000 immigrants from Ethiopia arrived.