

NEWSZAKA

DECEMBER 2009 / KISLEV 5770 / No. 12



ZAKA TEAMS UP WITH THE HOME FRONT NATIONAL SEARCH AND RESCUE UNIT



To donate: <http://www.zaka.us/Donations.asp>

Dear Friends of ZAKA,

Welcome to our new look NewsZAKA, bringing you up to date with some of the latest activities in the organization.

As we light the lights of Hanuka, let's pause a moment to give thanks for the selfless, dedicated work of the 1500 ZAKA volunteers working tirelessly in Israel and overseas for the good of Klal Yisrael.

These few men are able to carry out this sacred work. It is up to the rest of us to ensure that they have the support – financial as well as emotional – to continue their harrowing tasks.

Secure donations can be made via our website www.zaka.us. Thank you in advance for your generosity which allows ZAKA to continue its operations. Please forward this e-newsletter to family and friends.



*Yehuda Meshi-Zahav
ZAKA Chairman*

www.zaka.org.il

Main Office:

234 Jaffo St.
P.O. Box 36060
Jerusalem 91360
ISRAEL
Tel. 972-2-5015120
Fax. 972-2-5015121
Email:
info@zaka.org.il

USA:

1303 53rd st. #170
Brooklyn N.Y. 11219
USA
Tel: 1718-676-0039
Fax: 1718-865-0948
Email:
office@zaka.us

France:

20 bis rue Louis
Philippe
92200 Neuilly sur
Seine
Tel. 01-74-900-600
Fax. 01-73-049-207
Email:
contact@zaka-fr.org

England:

233a Golders Green
Road
London NW11 9ES
Registered Charity
No. 1099639
Tel: 020 8458 5391
Email:
info@zaka.org.uk

Canada:

suite 92, 2190 w
broadway Vancouver
B.C V6K 2C8
canada
Tel: 604-484-1944

ZAKA TEAMS UP WITH THE HOME FRONT NATIONAL SEARCH AND RESCUE UNIT



Home Front Commander Yair Golan recently cemented, yet further, the close working relationship between the Home Front Command and the ZAKA organization when he requested the integration of ZAKA volunteers into the prestigious National Search and Rescue Unit, considered one of the most professional units of its kind anywhere in the world.

The National Search and Rescue Unit is trained for special search

and rescue operations anywhere in Israel and abroad, both in routine times and in emergencies. Headed by a colonel in the reserves, the unit consists of reserve soldiers and a small number of soldiers doing their compulsory army service.

In addition to rescue personnel, other people serving in the unit include commanders, physicians, engineers, mechanical/engineering equipment operators, and rescue dogs trained to locate people

trapped under rubble.

Dozens of ZAKA volunteers from around Israel, headed by ZAKA Search and Rescue Unit commander Haim Outmezgine, underwent intense training exercises and drills with the members of the National Search and Rescue Unit at a destroyed building in a Jerusalem school. The exercises included rescuing people trapped in a collapsed building, setting up a mass casualty center and morgue etc.

ZAKA chairman Yehuda Meshi-Zahav noted: "The ZAKA volunteers, who have experience in dealing with tragedies during routine times, integrate well during emergencies. There's no doubt that the inclusion of the ZAKA volunteers and the additional training they are receiving in collapsed buildings improves their level of professionalism in the field and will allow them to be of great assistance to the National Search and Rescue Unit in saving lives."



9/11 MANHATTAN TRIBUTE TO ZAKA AND THE FDNY

On the 8th anniversary of the Twin Towers tragedy, senior representatives of the New York Fire Department (FDNY) and ZAKA were the guests of honour at a special memorial and tribute weekend held in Manhattan at the beginning of September. The weekend event, which was the personal initiative of Rabbi Yaakov Y. Kermaier of Manhattan's Fifth Avenue Synagogue, was held under the slogan "Tragedy and Redemption; Hell's Heroes in Conversation." The ZAKA delegation from Israel included ZAKA chairman and founder Yehuda Meshi-Zahav, Commander of the ZAKA Bedouin Unit Sheikh Akel Elatrash, Negev Unit commander Yehuda Lorber and



Sapir Divers Unit Commander Ilan Karmin.

During the terror attacks on September 11 2009, 343 New York firemen were killed, as they tried to free survivors from the twisted wreckage of the Twin Towers. ZAKA volunteers assisted the emergency and security services in identifying the victims and received a certificate of appreciation from New York City Hall for their work at the scene.

The weekend began with an intimate Friday evening at the Kermaier home, with the ZAKA volunteers sharing personal recollections and anecdotes of their rescue and recovery work in Israel and overseas. Religious and cultural differences melted into the background as Bedouin Sheikh Elatrash and ultra-orthodox Meshi-Zahav spoke of their shared values concerning the importance of honoring death as well as life.

The central event took place on the Saturday morning in the Fifth Avenue Synagogue, with the participation of the Chief of the New York Fire Department Salvatore Cassano and John Viggiano, a retired FDNY captain whose two

sons – one a police detective and the other a fireman – perished on 9/11, as well as the ZAKA delegation, rabbis and lay leaders.

FDNY Chief Cassano related the bravery, selfless dedication and leadership skills of his firefighters on 9/11 and commented on the slow rehabilitation process following the harsh blow the unit received. Cassano also pointed out the common bonds between the FDNY and ZAKA, two organizations that are poised to travel to the ends of the earth to rescue and save lives in any major incident.

In his address, Yehuda Meshi-Zahav pointed out that, too often, one sees pictures of fanatics around the world burning the Israeli and American flag together. This shared fate of the two peoples is reflected in the word Jerusalem, which has the letters USA at its center. "Three thousand years ago, when King David built Jerusalem, the fate of the two peoples was entwined, for better and for worse. We are happy to be on the same side."

ZAKA Bedouin Unit Commander Sheikh Akel Elatrash fascinated the congregation with his words of faith in the Creator, a faith that gives him the strength to rise above everything and show his people, by example, the importance of helping others.

Host Rabbi Yaakov Y. Kermaier thanked the "angels", as he called the FDNY and ZAKA representatives – different peoples, different religions, different appearances but one single purpose and desire to help others at any time and at all costs.

Yehuda Meshi-Zahav was presented with a FDNY helmet bearing the number 343 (the number of firefighters killed on 9/11), after presenting Cassano with the trademark ZAKA yellow vest ("I hope you won't have to use it", he quipped).



ZAKA's Global March Reaches Argentina

As part of the plan to expand the ZAKA International Rescue Unit into major Jewish communities around the world, ZAKA representatives met with Jewish community leaders, rabbis, decision-makers and political figures during a recent visit to Buenos Aires in Argentina.

In his meeting with several local rabbis including the Chief Rabbi of Argentina Rabbi Shlomo Ben Hamo, ZAKA chairman Yehuda Meshi-Zahav explained the rationale behind establishing a ZAKA International Rescue Unit in Buenos Aires. "ZAKA proved its ability to send emergency personnel at a moment's notice, during the Mumbai Chabad House siege," noted Meshi-Zahav. "By training a local team of first responders, we will be able to shorten the immediate response time and, in certain cases, obviate the need to fly out a team from Israel."

Meshi-Zahav also met with members of the local Jewish community centre Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA), which is located in the building which has replaced the one destroyed in the 1994 terrorist attack that killed 85 and injured hundreds more. In a meeting with the Argentinean Zionist Organisation, it was agreed that the establishment of the ZAKA International Rescue Unit would be a joint project with ZAKA and the local community.

In a festive reception in honor of the ZAKA delegation hosted by the Israel Ambassador to Argentina Mr. Danny Gazit and attended by the leaders of the local Jewish community, a letter from the Israel Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman was read out. "The activities of the ZAKA organization in Israel and overseas over the past years have been and continue to be sacred work worthy of praise and admiration. The organization proves, time and again, its importance and its ability and the great assistance it offers during difficult times in Israel and overseas."

ZAKA representatives also met with the Deputy Foreign Minister and other political leaders who all offered their support for the establishment of the ZAKA International Rescue Unit in Argentina. ■



ZAKA HOSTED BY AMERICAN AMBASSADOR TO ISRAEL

At his request, Mr. James Cunningham, American Ambassador to Israel, recently hosted ZAKA representatives in his Tel Aviv office, in order to receive a first-hand briefing of the scope of the organization's activities, both in Israel and overseas. In particular, the Ambassador expressed an interest in the assistance given by ZAKA at various disasters and terror attacks that had taken place in the US.

"We at the American Embassy in Israel have a special relationship and esteem for the ZAKA organization for its activities for humanity regardless of creed, race or gender," noted Ambassador Cunningham. "Our door will always be open to the humanitarian activities of ZAKA."

The meeting was attended by ZAKA Chairman and Founder Yehuda Meshi-Zahav, ZAKA CEO Arele Zur and the Head of the ZAKA International Rescue Unit Mati Goldstein. ■



IDENTITY UNKNOWN – UNTIL ZAKA GETS TO WORK...

For weeks, certain communities in Jerusalem were puzzled by the identity of the elderly man who collapsed in a mikve in Mea Shearim and died in hospital three weeks later without regaining consciousness. In an attempt to discover his identity, ZAKA volunteers circulated his photograph and trawled through the streets of Geula and Mea Shearim trying to find someone who could put an end to the mystery.

After a false identification, in which the man was nearly buried with the identity of someone who was subsequently found to be alive and well in Jerusalem, ZAKA volunteers continued to try and find someone who could make a positive identification. But without registering any success, the body was finally buried in an anonymous plot.

The identification was finally made after a family member contacted ZAKA's Bentzi Oring when he could not reach his elderly uncle who lived alone in the Knesset Yisrael neighborhood of Jerusalem.

Family members explained that the photo publicized by ZAKA, which depicted an emaciated person, did not bear resemblance to the uncle. DNA samples taken from family members determined once and for all the identity of the deceased man. ■

ZAKA'S NEW EL-AI UNIT



In a recent festive ceremony at Ben Gurion airport attended by the Minister of Religious Affairs Ya'acov Margi and El Al chairman Haim Romano, a new ZAKA volunteer unit in El Al was established. The unit, an initiative of El Al Rabbi Yochanan Chayut, will be integrated into the airline's preparations for handling aviation crisis situations in Israel and overseas.

The elite unit of forty of ZAKA's most experienced and professional volunteers is headed by Mati Goldstein who, as the head of the

ZAKA International Rescue Unit, has assisted in many international incidents including the terror attack at Chabad House in Mumbai and the plane crash in Buffalo, New York. The volunteers completed specialist training at El Al headquarters in Ben Gurion airport, which included the many aspects of dealing with aviation crises and cooperation with the various emergency and security personnel.

Minister of Religious Affairs Ya'acov Margi congratulated ZAKA on the establishment of the new unit, noting

that, as a former ZAKA volunteer, he was familiar with the important and sacred work of the organization.

El Al Unit commander Mati Goldstein promised that "the ZAKA El Al unit will offer a fast, professional and halachic response to any situation wherever it may happen, based on the experience which, unfortunately, we have acquired around the world in recent years. It is our privilege to be public emissaries in this sacred work."



ZAKA SECURES RELEASE OF BODY OF BRITISH JEW IN AMMAN

Thanks to the ceaseless efforts of ZAKA volunteers, headed by ZAKA chairman Yehuda Meshi-Zahav, the body of a Haredi London businessman who collapsed and died while on a business trip in Amman, Jordan was flown back to Israel for burial without the requisite autopsy.

When family members in Bnei Brak learned that the man, in his 70s, had collapsed, they contacted ZAKA's Jerusalem offices with an urgent plea to prevent an autopsy at all costs.

According to Jordanian law, an autopsy is necessary to rule out foul play, particularly given that the

man was injured during a fall down a flight of stairs in the hotel.

ZAKA volunteers immediately took advantage of diplomatic channels in order to prevent the breach of Jewish law and ensure respect to the body. ZAKA volunteer Cushi Rimon, who lives near Kilometer 101 on the Arava Road north of Eilat, used his connections with the Jordanian police to detain the autopsy until the ZAKA delegation arrived the following morning.

The members of the delegation, including ZAKA chairman Yehuda Meshi Zahav and head of the legal department Michael Goiten, crossed the border into Jordan. With the assistance of Arabic speaking interpreters, the ZAKA delegation explained the importance of avoiding an autopsy to the hospital administrators, police investigators, and chief pathologist with whom they

met at the Al-Bashir Hospital. Through a number of interpreters and meetings with high level officials, and with the help of Israeli Consul in Amman Dani Sivan, the waiver was received and the body was released.

In order to get the body out of Jordan, ZAKA had to navigate Jordanian bureaucracy to procure the permits from the British Consulate, the Israeli Consulate and Jordanian officials. For hours, the delegation wandered the streets of Amman with the body in an ambulance, traveling from consulate to consulate, and from office to office, until the appropriate papers were secured. Shortly before the closure of the border crossing at 9pm, the delegation finally crossed into Israel, with the body in a ZAKA ambulance. The body was buried later that same evening in the Beer Yaakov cemetery. ■



HUNDREDS OF ZAKA BODY BAGS LINE THE ENTRANCE TO THE KNESSET

It was a sight that, thankfully, had not been seen in Jerusalem for some time – ZAKA body bags lined up, one after the other, in an unending line along the sidewalk.

But this shocking spectacle was just that – a thought-provoking gimmick to attract the attention of Knesset members and visitors arriving at Jerusalem's seat of government in advance of Israel's Road Safety Day in early November. While the MKs marked the day by discussing ways to reduce the daily carnage on Israel's roads, the volunteers in the ZAKA rescue

and recovery organisation chose to reach them with a graphic demonstration for the need for urgent legislation. Over 400 fatalities are registered on Israel's roads.

ZAKA chairman and founder Yehuda Meshi-Zahav noted that "the next road accident victim will be in one of these bags - this is the harsh reality our volunteers deal with on a daily

basis. We will continue to work with the National Road Safety Authority and others to reduce the number of fatalities on our roads ■

