

NEWSZAKA

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Dear Friends of ZAKA,

Welcome to another edition of NewsZAKA, which is dedicated to the ZAKA International Rescue Unit.


During January, the ZAKA International Rescue Unit was active half way round the world from its Jerusalem base – both in Mexico and immediately afterwards in Haiti.

We are all very proud of the volunteers' important and life-saving mission in Haiti. This only serves to underline the importance of expanding the unit, by sharing our expertise in emergency response and training local volunteers to the benefit of the local communities.

Secure donations can be made via our websites www.zaka.us (dollars); www.zaka.org.uk (sterling) or www.zaka-fr.org (euros). Thank you in advance for your generosity which allows ZAKA to continue its operations.

Please forward this e-newsletter to family and friends.




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ZAKA IN HAITI

ZAKA DELEGATION HEAD: "THE SITUATION IS TRUE MADNESS... IT IS BEYOND COMPREHENSION."

Flying into Port-Au-Prince, Haiti on Thursday (14.1.10) in a Mexican air force Hercules plane, the ZAKA International Rescue Unit delegation, accompanied by Jewish volunteers from the Mexican Kedena organization, could clearly see the scale of the destruction caused by the earthquake two days earlier. But nothing could prepare them for the horror, stench and chaos that would greet them on arrival.

On arrival, the ZAKA delegation was dispatched to the collapsed

8-storey university building to search for survivors. "The pressure was enormous," recalls Goldstein. "We could hear the cries of people trapped but we were digging and digging and couldn't see them. It was frustrating" After 38 hours of work around the clock and working with rescue equipment provided by the Mexican military, the ZAKA volunteers succeeded in pulling eight students alive from the rubble. "We gave them liquids and cleaned them up. There was one survivor with open wounds - he began to move and talk, it gave us the strength to continue."

SHABBAT FROM HELL

Having received permission from their rabbis to continue working over Shabbat to save lives, the ZAKA volunteers worked on, with the other ultra-orthodox Jews from Mexico. Due to the breakdown in communications in Haiti at the beginning, Goldstein and his team were unable to make contact before Shabbat with the Israeli Home Front Command delegation that had arrived late on Friday.

In a disturbing email that Mati Goldstein managed to send to the ZAKA headquarters in Jerusalem, he wrote of the "Shabbat from hell. Everywhere, the acrid smell of bodies hangs in the air. It's just like the stories we are told of the Holocaust – thousands of bodies everywhere. You have to understand that the situation is true madness, and the more time passes, there are more and more bodies, in numbers that cannot be grasped. It is beyond comprehension."

In an interview with Israeli news website Ynet, Goldstein noted that "There was not really a Shabbat, but on Friday night we said Kiddush with delegations from Mexico, England, and Scotland.

KIDDUSH HASHEM

Goldstein and his fellow ZAKA volunteers were proud to have saved lives over Shabbat and felt strongly that their actions were Kiddush Hashem. "With all the hell going on outside, even when things get bad Judaism says we must take a deep breath and go on to save more people."

According to Goldstein in Ynet, cooperation between the international teams, which had arrived from 30 different states, was strengthened by the Shabbat prayer. "We sat with Jordanian security guards, an Israeli team, and people from Qatar and Egypt. It was strange."

DANGEROUS MISSION

In addition to the physical hardships and emotional challenges, the ZAKA volunteers had to contend with the lawlessness and security issues that threatened the lives of the rescue teams. Desperate for food and water, the Haitians were looting the rubble and ambushing rescue teams for supplies.

"We were unable to work at night because of the dangers," continues Goldstein. "During the day, we would move around with an armed guard from the United Nations. People were killing each other for water".

According to Dovie Maisel, Chief Operating Officer with the ZAKA International Rescue Unit, one of the most difficult aspects of the mission was being surrounded by Haitians, begging for a sip of water as well as pleading with them to help search the rubble of their homes for missing family members.

EMOTIONAL RESCUE

One of the most emotional moments for Goldstein and the ZAKA delegation came with the rescue of one woman from the rubble, who was thought to have died. Unwilling to leave her for dead, the ZAKA paramedics began work. "After a short while, she opened her eyes. Everyone around us had a tear in their eyes as we realized that every effort is worthwhile."

Another emotional, albeit surreal moment was captured on camera when tens of local Haitians expressed their gratitude to the ZAKA volunteers by singing Heveinu Shalom Aleichem in Hebrew.

Mati Goldstein, Dovie Maisel and ZAKA volunteer Dano Monkotavitz taught the locals the tune and the words in Hebrew and together, they took time out from the grim reality around them to sing together. (see video on the ZAKA website)



FOOD AND SHELTER

Goldstein and his fellow ZAKA volunteers with the Mexican delegation survived at first sleeping under the stars and eating the kosher energy bars they managed to buy in Mexico. Water was a scarce commodity for them as well. Eventually, they managed to sleep under a tent (Goldstein: "you can't speak about a shower") and received kosher food from Chabad and the American army.

"I narrowed by belt by one hole," Goldstein told the Jerusalem Post.

SEARCH FOR MISSING CANADIAN JEW

On Tuesday evening (19.1.10), ZAKA Jerusalem headquarters received a request for help from the Canadian family of Alexander (Shmuel) Bitton, who had just arrived at the Montana Hotel in Port-au-Prince when the earthquake struck.

ZAKA hotline volunteer Ya'acov Vag: "We have a first-hand account from his colleague Martin who had already received his room and Alex asked him to come down to reception to help him with a problem at the check-in. Martin came downstairs, the problem was solved and he returned to his room. Afterwards, he went to the poolside bar where he arranged to meet Alex. When the earthquake happened, Martin was still by the pool, some 10-12 minutes after he saw Alex for the last time."

The ZAKA Jerusalem headquarters forwarded the details to the ZAKA delegation in Haiti who searched the area, together with the IDF Home Front Command – to no avail.

HOME FROM HAITI

The ZAKA delegation wrapped up its activities in search and rescue only when it became apparent that the chances of finding anyone alive in the rubble after so many days were non-existent.

After nearly 2½ weeks away from their families and two missions (Mexico and Haiti), the ZAKA volunteers returned home, having lost weight but gained even more experience in dealing with mass casualty incidents.

In fact, just a day later, Goldstein joined ZAKA chairman Yehuda Meshi-Zahav in a Knesset committee debate on Israel's preparedness (or lack thereof) in dealing with the earthquake scenario that all experts are predicting for Israel. The ZAKA suggestion that yeshiva students be instructed in basic body recovery skills in order to function as "burial society reserves" was adopted by the committee chairman.



ARELE KLEIN'S DAILY BLOG

ZAKA volunteer Arele Klein, 39, blogged for the first few days from the field in Haiti. Working with the IDF Home Front Command field hospital as part of the second ZAKA delegation in Haiti, Arele, married and father of two, has volunteered with ZAKA for 16 years. Although he has witnessed all the major terror attacks in the Dan region, Haiti was his first international assignment.

THURSDAY, 14 JANUARY 2010

Ten in the morning. A phone call from ZAKA Operations Commander Haim Weingarten "You've been selected as a member of ZAKA's delegation to the earthquake disaster in Haiti, we're talking about a very difficult incident on the scale of the tsunami. Volunteers should be physically fit, mentally prepared and with experience. Please give your permission and ask for your wife's approval."

As a ZAKA volunteer of long standing, I had no hesitation even for a moment and without thinking for very long, I gave a positive answer there and then, on the condition that my wife would also agree. I went home, told my wife about the mission and asked for her approval. My wife's answer: my head says no, my heart says yes. And with that I received her blessing.

Noon. All members of the delegation arrive at the Home Front Command base for briefings, vaccines and various medications against all kinds of diseases that may break out in the disaster area. Only then did I begin to understand what I was about to do and worry started to creep into my thoughts – a fear of the unknown. ZAKA chairman Yehuda Meshi-Zahav spoke to the delegation members, giving us strength and encouragement; it was important.

OVERNIGHT THURSDAY/FRIDAY

14-hour flight from Israel to Haiti - a good opportunity to meet new friends from the Israeli delegation, the Home Front Command, rescue specialists, medical professionals, members of the Israel Police Forensic Unit and others. A lot of good people with the volunteering spirit who want to help, assist and rescue.

FRIDAY, 15 JANUARY 2010

Friday before Shabbat Landed at the destroyed Port-au-Prince airport. Immediately, I began to understand what this is about, planes carrying aid from around the world landing one after the other. I begin to absorb my surroundings, the collapsed buildings, the smell, the acrid smell of bodies in the air, the smell that is so familiar to us as ZAKA volunteers. But never have I known it in such an overwhelming manner.

KABBALAT SHABBAT

I find myself, together with the members of the Israeli delegation, on a football field, the delegation's makeshift base. Amid the turmoil and commotion, a minyan for Shabbat prayers forms itself. Head of the Israeli IDF delegation Brigadier-General Shalom Ben Aryeh joins Rabbi Shaul Ofen and others in prayer. The words of the prayers take on an even deeper significance and meaning, "O King who causes death and restores life".

Still haven't managed to unpack the containers, so all that we have brought for Shabbat remains packed away. We received an assignment of two challot and could only dream of the fish and meat that we would normally eat on Shabbat. At least our situation is better than the condition of the other ZAKA delegation that arrived directly

from Mexico - they only have canned goods.

OVERNIGHT FRIDAY/SATURDAY

The sophisticated field hospital was built overnight, in conditions that can only be described as no conditions. Just incredible. We are ready to begin work.

The ZAKA delegation is assigned to work in the field hospital as paramedics and also with responsibility for the deceased. I still haven't had time to breathe, but already the rumor has spread and a long line of Haitians await treatment. There are no words to describe the pain and sorrow in the picture that confronts us, such difficult images, so hard to bear. Men, women and children in various states of injury, from light to critical, many with severed or dangling limbs, all waiting in line quietly, a chilling calm, without cries or screams, just waiting their turn for treatment.

The ZAKA volunteers receive the severed limbs for burial - hands, feet and other organs, in numbers that are impossible to count. I feel a strong need to put my feelings on hold, to try to work like a robot. But it does not work over time, and, when no one notices, I move away from the tent, and break down in tears, crying for the sorrow and grief that has descended on the people of Haiti, to see other human beings, people just like me, in such a state of sheer helplessness and horror.

SUNDAY, 17 JANUARY 2010.

Noon. A Haitian child who appears to be around ten years old – the same age as my son – arrives at the hospital after being rescued from one of the collapsed buildings, hovering between life and death. His mother mutters words and phrases in a language I cannot understand. But her eyes, streaming with tears, express everything. A mother, with all the meaning that word implies, is beside herself with concern, pleading that we save the life of her ten-year-old son. After 30 minutes attempting to save his life, I must sadly inform her that her son has died. It felt as if the earth was moving yet again with the intensity of her cries, as the pain pierced the air. I can continue my work, but I must take some time out.

Like all ZAKA volunteers, we are used to receiving expressions of gratitude from all, religious and secular, with phrases such as 'good for you', 'holy work'. But there can be no comparison to the extent of the Kiddush Hashem (sanctification of God's name) that the ZAKA delegation is doing here in Haiti. The public address system in the field hospital never seems to stop in its calls for our presence: "Arele from ZAKA, please report. Sami from ZAKA, please report." From the regular soldier to the delegation commander, everyone understands the importance of, and praises, the work of the ZAKA volunteers.

Such warm and friendly personal connections have been made here – I think to myself, why do we need to fly so far to realize how special the people are in Israel.

MONDAY, 18 JANUARY 2010

Four in the morning. We are attending to a woman bearing twins in childbirth. The first baby is born dead. Try to avoid giving the terrible news to the mother when the unbelievable happens. The monitor jumps into life and shows that the second child is alive. I am overwhelmed with the mix of emotions.

We cannot count the number of bodies transferred for burial in a mass grave. The human brain cannot absorb the quantity of bodies that we



have been exposed to in these first few days in Haiti. I discover a strange sight at one of the mass graves - families have a special tune that they sing at the graveside, a song that moves back and forth from song to tears, singing and crying. Who can understand it?

I receive a four-year-old boy for treatment, accompanied by his 16-year-old brother – the only survivors in the family who are still buried beneath the rubble of their home. Again the picture repeats itself, nothing to do but pronounce the child dead. When I announce the painful news, his brother cries out in anguish and, in total despair, begins running toward the mountains. He does not want to receive his brother's body.

We continue to receive the injured who wait patiently in line for treatment. We work like a sophisticated automated machine, but the line never ends, it only ever seems to get longer. But who can stop at the sight of people so desperate for help.

TUESDAY, 19 JANUARY 2010

I stand above the ruins of the Montana Hotel in an attempt to find the missing Jewish 36-year-old Canadian businessman Alex Bitton, who was last seen in the hotel just before the earthquake struck. I am holding a bottle of water. A group of children aged around 6 or 7 are staring at me with longing eyes and ask me to give them a drink from the bottle in my hands. My entire body trembled when at that moment, I understood what my grandfather, a Holocaust survivor, would tell me about the significance of even a small sip of water.

Arele Klein and fellow ZAKA volunteer Sami Grossman returned to Israel with the IDF mission after responsibility for the injured in the hospital was transferred to the Americans.



ZAKA IN MEXICO

JUST 6 DAYS BEFORE 50 LOCAL VOLUNTEERS SLATED TO BEGIN ZAKA TRAINING IN RESCUE AND RECOVERY

In a tragic and cruel twist of fate, the ZAKA International Rescue Unit delegation which was due to fly to Mexico City in early January to begin training 50 local volunteers in rescue and recovery techniques, flew out on 11 January to attend to the scene of the helicopter crash in which Mexican Jewish businessman and philanthropist Moises Saba was killed along with his wife, son and daughter-in-law and two others on Sunday night.

The idea to establish a ZAKA International Rescue Unit in Mexico, trained by Israeli ZAKA volunteers, was borne out of a ZAKA tribute evening which Moises Saba hosted in his home in November 2008,

where guest of honor former US President Bill Clinton was the keynote speaker. Saba's generosity facilitated the establishment and training of the Mexico ZAKA International Rescue Unit.

"Who could have imagined, not just that the Mexican volunteers would need to learn the course content hands-on, in a real incident, but that it would involve the tragic death of the person who initiated and funded the course," noted head of the ZAKA International Rescue Unit Mati Goldstein as he prepared to board today's flight to Mexico.

"This tragic incident only serves to highlight the need for locally-



based, ZAKA-trained volunteers who can respond immediately and professionally to emergency situations,” adds ZAKA International Rescue Unit Chief Operating Officer Dovie Maisel who also left for Mexico City today, with two other ZAKA volunteers. Rabbi David Yosef, son of former Chief Rabbi of Israel Rabbi Ovadia Yosef who was close to Moises Saba, accompanied the ZAKA delegation

Before leaving for Mexico, the ZAKA delegation met with Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, who gave his halachic ruling regarding the ZAKA team’s work in collecting body parts at the crash scene. They then met with Israeli Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar, who sent with the delegation a letter to his counterpart in Mexico, requesting to delay the funeral of the victims until the ZAKA team has completed its work in collecting all body parts from the scene of the crash.

FROM HELICOPTER CRASH TO EARTHQUAKE

When all the body parts were found, the funerals went ahead following another halachic ruling and the ZAKA volunteers continued their work in clearing the site. It was at this point that the quake in Haiti struck, and, without hesitation, the ZAKA volunteers decided to continue to Haiti, a relatively short distance from Mexico City.

Using the connections of the Saba family and others in Mexico, the ZAKA delegation managed to fly out with the Mexican air force delegation on Wednesday, 13 January, receiving the mandatory seven injections on the flight. The speed of the operation meant that the ZAKA volunteers were the first Israeli delegation on the ground in Haiti, working together with the Mexican team.



ZAKA TEAM TO MEXICO RECEIVES A BLESSING AND HALACHIC RULING TO THE MISSION FROM FORMER CHIEF RABBI RAV OVDAIA YOSEF & CHIEF RABBI SHLOMO AMAR



ZAKA IN HAITI



ZAKA IN HAITI



ZAKA IN MEXICO



ZAKA IN MEXICO

