



JEWISH FEDERATIONS OF CANADA - UIA
הפדרציות היהודיות בקנדה - UIA
FÉDÉRATIONS JUIVES DU CANADA - UIA

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July 2015 - Reflections from the CEO

By Linda Kislowicz



I have just returned from a very intense month in Israel. A week of Keren Hayesod and Jewish Agency meetings was followed by a complete tour of the Canadian partnership regions - Eilat/Eilot, Bat Yam/Kiryat Moshe, Sderot, Beer Sheva/B'nei Shimon and the five northern communities in Etzba Hagalil - where I held strategic meetings with Israeli colleagues and partners. My tour ended with some personal family time. What follows are my thoughts and impressions following this inspiring journey.

Highlights of the Keren Hayesod-UIA and Jewish Agency Meetings

The annual Keren Hayesod – UIA conference took place in the beautiful winery region of the Judean Hills. The itinerary included a visit to a naval base in Ashdod, a briefing by Ambassador *Ron Prozor*, Israel's 16th Permanent Representative to the United Nations and several award presentations including the Israel Goldstein Prize for Distinguished Leadership to Ambassador *Avi Pazner*, the Yakir Award presentations and the *Avi-Hai* Award for Exemplary Young Leadership to *Jason Rubinoff* from Toronto and *Fabiënne Meijers* from Amsterdam.

Kesher – the *Julia Koschitzky* Seminar for Keren Hayesod Young Leadership, which included 4 Canadian participants, coincided with the annual KH conference. Key agenda items focused on engaging younger leaders, strengthening and rejuvenating campaigns around the world and exploring new funding models relevant to the younger generation of donors.

The Jewish Agency Assembly and Board of Governors session topics included:

- Briefings and updates on the state of the Jewish People:
 - A chilling regional update by *Ehud Yaari*, Israeli journalist, author, television personality and political commentator
 - An inspiring talk by *Daniel Gordis*, Senior Vice President and the *Koret* Distinguished Fellow at *Shalem College* in Jerusalem, that focused on some of the positive factors of this generation
 - A presentation by leadership from The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute (JPPPI) giving the annual "state of the nation" report on the Jewish people
- *Aliyah* from France, Ukraine and other countries in Europe, which totalled 30,000 this year. This considerable increase of new olim over past years is demanding extraordinary resources to prepare and absorb families for their new life in Israel.



- The conversion process and its implications for Diaspora Jewry: Serious concern was expressed over the regressive positions taken and the resulting ground lost impacting Israelis and Diaspora Jews, most notably the progressive liberal groups in the Diaspora.
- The Government of Israel World Jewry project: While efforts are still under way to come to an agreement, there are concerns as to the role of the government and the Jewish Agency in the model currently under consideration. The original model has been diluted and it remains unclear as to whether and how this initiative will move forward.
- Social Housing: In response to a growing shortage of affordable housing, due in part to the needs of new immigrants and veteran populations, the Jewish Agency, in collaboration with the government, is developing a significant project to increase the availability of social housing units. The working committee for this initiative includes Shoel Silver and Julia Berger Reitman.
- Next Generation: Update included a discussion on the current situation on college campuses and the effectiveness of the Jewish Agency campus fellows program, the growth of the schlichim program all over the world and the 20th anniversary of the Jewish Agency's signature program Youth Futures and its new structure.

Genesis Prize

We attended the 2nd annual Genesis Prize award ceremony, which honoured actor Michael Douglas. He has donated the prize money from this prestigious award to fostering openness and inclusiveness in Jewish communities across the globe. The \$1 million prize was matched and leveraged to reach \$3.5 million. Grants for innovative programs will be available through the Jewish Funders Network. Communities will be expected to obtain matching grants in order to be eligible for these funds. JFC-UIA plans to convene a group of Canadian professionals to brainstorm project ideas and submit applications.

Partnership Communities

Over the past 9 years I have had many opportunities to visit the Canadian partnership communities. I have attended many events such as scholarship ceremonies, facility openings and steering committee meetings.

This time, I visited all of the Canadian partnership regions – Eilat/Eilot, Bat Yam/Kiryat Moshe, Sderot, Beer Sheva/B'nei Shimon and the five northern communities in the Galilee Panhandle.

This comprehensive tour allowed me to take in a macro view of our accomplishments, our challenges and our plans for the future. I was very impressed by our professional team in each community - with their passion, commitment, knowledge and expertise. Each team has developed broad networks in the field and is deeply embedded in their regions, where they are respected and valued by peers, colleagues and community members.

I saw a diverse network made up of strategic partners - municipal leaders, mayors, volunteers, philanthropists and social entrepreneurs - who regularly collaborate and share our vision for innovation and our mission to develop a stronger and more populated periphery.

I was particularly inspired by the development of initiatives in the fields of health education and care, technology and STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics). These initiatives will provide young people from these regions with the tools necessary to advance and compete professionally with peers from central Israel. It is expected that as these initiatives progress, they will contribute to reducing the social gaps between the periphery and the centre. At the same time, these opportunities will motivate families to relocate from the centre of the country as they will be able to enjoy a good quality of life in the northern and southern peripheries with access to education and health care at a level comparable to that in other parts of the country.

Each partnership works within a set of common macro themes which together create a strong collective impact, yet are flexible enough so that they can be modified to suit the unique strategic context and characteristics of a particular region.

Overall, we can be proud that we are seeding projects that give people the tools necessary to advance in their lives with dignity and independence. I was deeply moved by our work with children and adults with special needs, and by our work with populations with social challenges, such as Bedouin women, Haredi families and Druzim.

From the exciting innovation of renewable energy in Eilat, to the support for STEM education in Eilat, Sderot, Beer Sheva and the Galil, to the Bar Ilan medical school in Tsfat - now a fully developed program attracting students, faculty and researchers - to the Sydney Warren Science Centre at Tel Hai college, to nursing scholarships and Birthright visits to schools in Bat Yam, to leadership development in Beit Vancouver, a Fringe theatre in Beer Sheva, to an encounter with a very courageous group of Bedouin women in Beer Sheva....the list of high impact projects is never ending. It is evidence that Canadian communities are heavily invested and meaningfully engaged in strengthening the capacities of their partnership region.

The universal goals of the Canadian Partnership2Gether initiatives are as valid today as when they were conceived years ago. We continue to invest in projects and programs that strengthen the periphery by developing the key community elements required for a rich quality of life in northern and southern Israel, and to complement the efforts of local government bodies to ensure that investments are in synch with our mutual goals.

I returned to Canada proud of our successes, of the tremendous value and respect for our collaborative efforts and of the incredible depth of the Canadian Jewish community's connection to Israel. I am eager to work with our local, national and international partners to realize the immeasurable potential that exists to further strengthen the already sturdy bridge that connects Israel and Canadian Jewry.

JFC-UJA and Canadian Jewish Federations and Jewish communities are true partners in the growth and development of this wonderful and complex country. As individuals and as a collective, we are connected and engaged in ways that benefit all of us.