

RABBIS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



RHR Legal Director Adv. Quamar Mishirqi-Assad, center, discusses details with villagers from Bir Al-Idd as they finally return to their homes after being expelled a decade ago. RHR's legal team scored several major victories this year...





Educational Director Rabbi Navah Hefetz takes pre-army academy students on a tour of East Jerusalem after a year of studying "Tractate Independence."

Rabbis for Human Rights continues to update our communications, and you will notice that some changes have been made in the format and approach of our Annual Report this year. We have tried to organize as much information as possible about our major activities and achievements in as an efficient manner as possible. As you know, nearly every day something is happening in our part of the world related to our human rights mandate, and it is impossible to provide you with every detail of our work in this Report's summary. We send our weekly email newsletter to keep you up-to-date, and oftentimes send additional emails when urgent matters arise.

In the coming year, we hope to send detailed quarterly newsletters to you online. These will feature some of the in-depth articles about our activities, opinion pieces, and personal stories that we've typically included in our longer annual newsletters until now. The online newsletter will save trees and shipping costs by allowing us to publish the more succinct annual report you are reading now, and the online newsletters can include valuable features such as video footage, links to our appearances in the press, advocacy updates and invitations to get involved, and much more. Of course, we must have a current email address for you:

If you do not already receive email from RHR (and RHR-NA, if you reside in North America), please sign up by sending a request to our office at info@rhr.israel.net or by providing your contact information through our website at www.rhr.org.il.

RHR's website will undergo a renovation in the coming months to facilitate even easier access to information about RHR and our work. This Annual Report will also appear online on our site, together with a Hebrew version for our Israeli readers.

We are always pleased to listen to your comments, questions, and suggestions about these communication upgrades, our Annual Report, or about our work. You are welcome to contact us at the email above or by phone [972-2-648-2757] to share your thoughts with us.

On November 30th, 2010, Rabbi Arik Acsherman's and Professor Alice Shalvi received the first annual Leibovitch Prize awarded by *Yesh Gvul* to individuals exemplifying the thought and values of the noted religious philosopher and social critic, Professor Yeshayahu Liebovitch. Rabbi Ascherman's acceptance speech can be found in English at <http://rhr.org.il/page.php?name=article&id=25&language=en>.



From RHR's Executive Director, Rabbi Arik Ascherman

Most people say they never believed we would succeed in entirely cancelling the Israeli Wisconsin Plan. I knew RHR had staff that would give their all for the sake of justice and had faith in the decency of my fellow Israelis and in the possibility of drawing nearer to the world I believe God ordained. I believed. (Although I didn't say it out loud.) As you will read in these pages, Wisconsin's defeat is arguably the most significant Israeli social justice victory in many years. Sometimes I say that our job is to do the "impossible."

Today, the voices of children are again heard in Bir al-'Id, where there had quite simply been nothing but silent emptiness for 10 years because of army-backed settler intimidation. In our educational programs, settler youth are experiencing the realities of Palestinian life, while privileged young people are exposed to the realities of Israeli poverty. University students who have studied Jewish texts all their lives are relearning those texts through a different lens.

The July 7th op-ed by Nick Kristoff in the New York Times about our work was but one of the acknowledgements in the press and by colleagues as to the value of our work.

http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/08opinion/08kristof.html?_r=1&ref=nicholasdkristof

The Midrash teaches that Elisheva, wife of Aaron the High Priest, had four reasons to rejoice the day the tabernacle was dedicated. Her husband, children, brother and brother-in-law were all honored. Yet, her joy turned to mourning because on that day two of her sons were consumed by fire. Similarly, two immanent dangers threaten to consume us today.

The Occupied Territories, particularly East Jerusalem, are dry tinder waiting for the accidental match to send them up in the flames of a third intifada nobody wants. A perceived new level of tolerance in Washington for Israeli human rights violations may well allow that match to be lit.

Today, RHR and our fellow HR organizations are demonized in ways recalling the atmosphere in Israel during the First Lebanon War in 1982. Groups such as NGO Monitor pave the way for slanderous smear campaigns and libelous "reports." Proposed Knesset legislation would dry up sources of our funding, brand us with the mark of Cain, and make it illegal to pass on information about alleged Israeli HR violations. A recent poll indicated that 57% of the Israeli public agrees that it should be illegal to reveal Israeli HR violations.

Until the Gaza War, many Israelis who disagreed with us were nonetheless proud we existed and understood how essential we are to Israel's democracy. However, polls show that increasingly fewer young people believe in the basic tenets of democracy. I see three root causes for this dangerous shift in public opinion:

1) Today we are reaping what we failed to sow during the many years in which others quietly invested much more than we in grass roots education.

2) The public's lack of knowledge regarding reports that Hamas was willing to continue the June 2008 cease fire if only Israel had been willing to live up to it's own commitment for the ceasefire - to ease the blockade. Those with agendas therefore succeeded in spinning the line that anybody who even calls for an Israeli investigation into the Gaza War does not care about the residents of Sderot...despite the fact that RHR both called for an Israeli investigation, and petitioned foreign governments to pressure Hamas into stopping the kassams. We also had RHR members living in bomb shelters.

3) Israelis are frustrated, angry and confused because criticism about Gaza is not going away. Israeli HR organizations are being scapegoated.

Every minute we are forced to spend fighting to preserve Israeli democracy is a minute we should be spending helping Israel live up to ideals described in our Declaration of Independence of a country based on "Freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel." However, we must fight this fight in order to preserve our ability to fight for anything else. I hope and pray that those who disagree with some or all of our positions will lead this struggle.

I write on Tu B'Av, a kind of Jewish cross between Valentine's Day and Sadie Hawkin's Day. Tu B'Av follows on the heels of Tisha B'Av, when we mourn the destruction of the two Temples that once stood in Jerusalem. We learn that the second Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred. Just as Tu B'Av follows Tisha B'Av, I pray that we find a way to move beyond the hatred threatening to engulf us. We have a few more "impossible" tasks left to accomplish.

**B'vracha,
Rabbi Arik Ascherman**

From RHR's Board Chairperson, Rabbi Barry Leff



"Whoever can prevent his household from committing a sin, but does not, is held responsible for their sins; if he can prevent his fellow citizens, and does not, he is held responsible for their sins; if he can prevent the whole world from sinning and does not, he is held responsible for the sins of the whole world" (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 54b).

The modern state of Israel is the most important thing to happen to the Jewish people in nearly 2,000 years. After two millennia during which we lived only as guests in other people's countries, we once again have a home of our own. We once again are challenged, as a sovereign nation, to live up to the vision of our prophets – to be a just and moral nation.

When looking at the human rights situation in Israel and the territories under Israeli control, one can view the glass as either "half full" or "half empty." Compared to other countries in our difficult neighborhood – countries like Syria and Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan – our record on human rights is stellar. Yet compared to the United States or the European Union, we still have much room for progress.

We at Rabbis for Human Rights believe it is not good enough to be "better than Syria." We believe in the ideals expressed in Israel's 1948 Declaration of Independence:

"The State of Israel...will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as

envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture..."

Alas, we have a long way to go before we live up to those ideals. The 43-year-old occupation of the West Bank—and the continued "occupation from afar" of Gaza—has resulted in many human rights violations, from destruction of homes and confiscation of private property to lack of access to healthcare. Within Israel, discrimination against minorities including Arabs, Druze, Bedouins, Ethiopian Jews, Mizrahi Jews, and foreign workers is still rampant. Income inequality is on the rise. We have a lot of work ahead of us.

As the new chairman of RHR, my initial focus has been to start a strategic planning process. The strategic plan will help us to focus our efforts where we can do the most good and have the most impact.

As the Talmud teaches, "All Israel is responsible one for the other" (Babylonian Talmud, Shevuot 39a). Your support for RHR enables us to continue the vitally important work of helping the state of Israel live up to its full potential. With your help we will someday reach the point where the only work we have left to do is to teach about Judaism and human rights in an abstract sense, because there will no longer be human rights violations for us to battle.

**B'vracha,
Barry Leff**

*** Rabbis Barry Leff and Moshe Yehudai became RHR's new co-chairs/treasurer in March. We wish them success, and express our sincere thanks to our outgoing chairperson and treasurer, Rabbis Anita Steiner and Ma'ayan Turner.**

Occupied Territories(OT)

Even as the hard-won rights of Palestinian farmers were solidified by improved behavior from Israeli security forces, RHR's OT legal staff forged ahead with important new victories that returned lands to their rightful owners and returned people to their homes. RHR completed the preliminary steps in the launch of a High Court appeal against discriminatory zoning practices that pave the way for the policy of Palestinian home demolitions in Area C. With RHR's help, the school made of mud and tires for the Jahalin Bedouin opened its doors and students completed an entire school year despite the ongoing demolition threat. A surge of cooperative Israeli and Palestinian activism is a bright light in an otherwise bleak and explosive situation in East Jerusalem.

Bir al-Id – A Community Restored And Threatened Again

Bir al-Id used to be home to 397 Palestinians. The village residents maintained a unique way of life, drawing water from wells and pits in the area around their huts, tents, and cave dwellings. Between 1999 and 2001, settlers from the illegal outposts of Havat Talia and Mitzpe Yair, with the support of the IDF, expelled the residents.

Last year we proudly reported that, thanks to our efforts, Bir al-Id villagers were poised to return to their homes after ten long years. This year it happened. There is now a living community once again where for ten years there was only silence and empty caves.

Within days of the first families cautious arrival however, it became apparent that although the villagers were allowed to return, they might not be allowed to survive. Their right to use the single access road that leads to the village – a road the villagers themselves built 20 years ago but which is now controlled by settlers – was blocked by the army despite a previous agreement and the OT Legal Advisor's own ruling. RHR's legal team secured the villagers' right to use the road. RHR and partner organization Ta'ayush must continue to ensure the villagers' right to access water and graze their sheep.

Most recently, we began fighting orders to demolish animal pens and tents donated by humanitarian organizations that help house the villagers in addition to the caves. RHR obtained a temporary freeze on the demolitions while we prepare a revised local zoning plan for the residents in our last, best-hope effort to prevent what amounts to a second, and likely final, eviction of the villagers.



IDF and Settlers prevent Bir al-Id returnees from using access road



Advocate Quamar Mishirqi-Asad and Ta'ayush activist Ezra Nawi with returnees



Rabbi Arik Ascherman and RHR volunteers at Bir Al-Id work day

Legal Combat – Returning Lands to their Palestinians Owners

The restoration of Bir al-Id is but one example of our using the legal system to return lands stolen from Palestinians in the OT. In an encouraging precedent, the military appeals committee recently rejected a settler's attempt to overturn an earlier RHR victory that restored a large tract (30 dunam) of land stolen from the Hushiya family. The committee's decision significantly weakens a legal strategy employed by settlers to usurp lands and draw out legal cases indefinitely. Two years after our victory, the ruling will finally be carried out and the Hushiya family will work their land once again.

A partial, but important, success was the preservation of residency rights for some of the Abu Qabaita family. The family's 80-some members live in the South Hebron Hills near the Beit Yatir settlement and the unauthorized outpost of Havat Talia. In 2005 these two settlements were included on the Israeli side of the Separation Barrier, which in this and in many other locations deviates from the 'Green Line' demarcating sovereign Israel from areas occupied in 1967. Approximately 30,000 other Palestinians are caught in "seam-zones" between the Barrier and the 'Green Line'.

Since 2009, the Abu Qabaita family has been required to apply for permits from the Israeli Civil Administration in order to leave or return to their homes. Two-thirds of the family (fifty adults and children) were denied permits and suffered difficulties at nearby checkpoints. In September 2009 RHR petitioned the Supreme Court, arguing that the denial of permanent residence status gravely violates their rights. As a result, the Civil Administration granted thirty appellants of the Abu Qabaita family permits enabling them to continue living in their homes on their private land.

Women and children unpack their belongings as they return to their homes in Bir Al -'Id after being expelled ten years ago



- ❖ Hushiya family lands returned (another tract still pending)
- ❖ Abu Qabaita family permits granted (to some but not all)
- ❖ Entrance gained to lands for Palestinian farmers near Otniel
- ❖ Revolutionary court ruling achieved that demands guarantees paid against possible damages to Palestinians caused by land encroachment by a settler.
- ❖ IDF barricade removed near Yanoun gaining entrance to land
- ❖ At least six cases heard by Israel's High Court and multiple cases heard in various appeals committees.
- ❖ Seven new cases on land issues
- ❖ Over 20 criminal or other complaints filed

With some 85 cases open involving more than 8,000 dunam (2,000 acres) of land, our work continues to ensure landowners access to their lands situated close to settlements and illegal outposts. Our work is concentrated in the South Hebron Hills area, where we protect land rights on some 6,000 dunam in 70 cases. These proceedings can last years, but ultimately enable us to shift the balance of power and use legal processes to combat offenses by settlers. RHR took on 7 new cases against land takeovers in the past year and filed over 20 criminal or other complaints.

The demolition orders against the tents of Bir il 'Id is but one example of the intentional manipulation of zoning and building plans and regulations that enable the policy of demolishing homes. In an attempt to undermine this long-standing pattern of human rights violations, RHR is in the midst of preparing a High Court petition charging Israeli authorities with responsibility for the lack of proper planning in Area C. RHR and partners *ICAH*D and the *El-Quds Center* argue that current planning is intentionally inadequate, and that zoning and planning should be in the hands of local Palestinians rather than the army. Much of our information is based on a detailed study of zoning practices we requested Bimkom to conduct.

Almost all of our successes in returning Palestinian lands overtaken by settlers have been achieved through appeals to either the OT legal advisor or the High Court, and in regard to takeovers less than five years old. Lands overtaken many years ago, however, fall under the jurisdiction of the Magistrate's Court. Thanks to a designated donation enabling us to launch an important test on a case dating back more than five years, RHR has realized a goal of entering this largely uncharted territory towards reversing some of the longstanding injustices of Israel's land confiscations.

Our successes in the S. Hebron Hills are due in part to the information sharing and cooperation with partner organizations such as *Ta'ayush* and *Breaking the Silence*. Their volunteers and educational tours about human rights issues in the region work in tandem with RHR legal support. Thanks to support from *AECID*, the *EU*, and the *Firedoll* and *Iris O'Brien Foundations*, we have trained several new lawyers, expanded our case portfolio in the South Hebron Hills, and are currently preparing new petitions for large tracts of land in the Hebron area. We hope to increase capacity further and extend our portfolio in the Shilo valley in the northern West Bank where our field-work is most intense.

Defending Bedouin School of Tires and Mud

The continued survival-against-all-odds of the Jahalin School of Tires that RHR helped build last summer at Khan El Ahmar continues to be an inspiration. Despite constant harassment from the neighboring settlement of Kfar Adumim and a standing demolition order from the Israeli government, the Jerusalem Bedouin Cooperative leadership's courage and ingenuity enabled the school's sixty students to complete their academic year.

RHR volunteers helped construct the environmentally innovative school with funding and architects supplied by the Italian NGO *Viento De Terra*. To make the school operational, RHR provided funds to erect a fence, assisted the Jahalin in securing teachers from the Palestinian Authority, and facilitated a petition to the Israeli Supreme Court. The court was unwilling to cancel the demolition orders, but also rejected a demand from a settler activist group to demolish immediately. RHR publicized the case in the foreign and local press and wrote letters appealing to the conscience of local leaders, the Ministers of Defense and Education, and members of Kfar Adumim's educational institutions: Wouldn't they agree that children – including Bedouin Palestinian children – have the right to an education?!

The answer is yes – at least for the last academic year - thanks to the devoted work of Rabbi Amita Jarmon, Ross Weissman, *Viento De Terra*, the Combini Sisters of Azaria, Canadian volunteers from *Operation Groundswell*, *ICHAD*, and the assistance RHR was able to give. This is a small and perhaps temporary victory, but of immeasurable importance to these children.



RHR volunteers and other activists protest the uprooting of olive trees to make way for the Separation Barrier in the fields of Beit Jallah.

Olive Tree Campaign - Agricultural Access for Palestinian Farmers

This year we saw fewer instances of local army officers evading their obligation to protect Palestinians while allowing them access to all their lands - conditions stipulated in our 2006 High Court victory. Unfortunately, hopelessness and exhaustion forced fewer farmers to exercise their rights to access lands without prior army coordination.

This improvement allowed RHR to address another aspect of the 2006 decision which has never been carried out: The obligation of security forces to prevent trees from being cut down in the middle of the night. This phenomenon has worsened with "Operation Price Tag", the settler policy of extracting a "price" every time one of their structures is removed by the army. RHR began creating a paper trail that documents the failure of security forces to protect trees in situations where we warn tree destruction is clearly likely. Though security forces contend that protection of every tree is impossible, RHR argues that resources must be invested in areas with a history of destruction. Our proof: At our insistence, the army did station border police around the Khavat Gilad outpost for several months last fall. Destruction of trees and property dropped to almost zero, as did attacks on Palestinians. Undoubtedly, the personal security of the settlers was improved as well.

Despite the fact that drought and a lean year for olives shortened the harvest season, RHR brought over 200 volunteers (many of whom went out on multiple occasions) on 41 workdays to assist 23 villages during the annual autumn olive harvest. RHR's staff monitored and assisted in many additional villages.



Harvest 2009: RHR Field Coordinator Zakariya Sadeh and volunteers ensure Palestinian farmers from Jitt can harvest their olives.



Rabbi Ascherman replants trees uprooted in Beit Jalla

As in years past, RHR planted trees with Palestinian farmers to strengthen their demonstration of ownership on jeopardized lands or to replace trees uprooted either by settlers or during the construction of the Separation Barrier. With the help of *Trocaire*, the *Karl Kahane Foundation*, Core Funders, and many individual donors, RHR planted 3,500 trees (mostly olives) this year in the villages of: Susiya, Murier, Awarta, Karyut, El Genia, Kadum, Misrah El Kablia, Jitt, Turmesia, Nabi Sallah, Dir Nj'bam, Hirbat Tanna, Safa, Sinjil and Harris.

East Jerusalem

A third intifada is but a match away in an increasingly combustible Jerusalem, though a burgeoning protest movement has produced some hope. International pressure kept matters under control until August 2009, when the Ghawi and Hanoun families were evicted from their homes in Sheikh Jarakh. Despite assurance from the international community that the strength of their diplomatic rebukes would prevent further evictions, part of an additional home was given over to settlers in December 2009 and court proceedings continue against additional families, all of whom are refugees from 1948.

The Israeli High Court permitted the resumption of exploratory archaeological digs that damaged homes in the Wadi Hilweh neighborhood of Silwan. In June, the Jerusalem planning commission approved a plan to create an archeological theme park by demolishing “only” 22 homes in Silwan’s El-Bustan neighborhood. The plan ignores alternatives presented by the local community and makes only vague offers to build new homes on top of the remaining buildings. Also in June, violence exploded next to Beit Yonatan, the seven-story structure built without permits by Jews in the heart of Silwan and where Jerusalem’s mayor is doing everything to delay action, despite a court order. Stone-throwing and arrests have increased, and even Israeli peace and human rights activists need to be accompanied in some parts of Silwan.

On the positive side, weekly demonstrations against the expulsion of Palestinian families from Sheik Jarrakh began last year, resulting in massive media exposure and successful public education efforts throughout the country. Led by an outpouring of young Israeli activists in partnership with Palestinian residents, these efforts have been purposefully waged without the official participation of established organizations. RHR has nevertheless played an important supportive role. RHR’s Sherut Leumi (National Service) full-time volunteer, Maya Yehieli, was instrumental in organizing and leading the protest movement, and we supplied administrative and other support. Rabbi Ascherman’s essay “Armageddon, Straight Ahead” describing a night in Sheikh Jarakh, was widely distributed and posted on websites.

<http://www.rhr.org.il/page.php?id=24&language=en&name=article>

RHR’s Yehieli and Rabbis Ascherman and Grenimann were among tens of activists arrested during the protests. The courts have rebuked police for unjustified arrests and denying the right of protest. Still, a three-month restraining order was leveled against many of those arrested, including Yehieli and Ascherman. Both will stand trial for sitting down in front of police barricades to protest the policy of *eifa v’eifa* - double standards: Police allow right-wing activists to enter the neighborhood freely and stand by while Palestinian residents are harassed or have their windshields smashed. Meanwhile, human rights activists are restricted from the neighborhood and police find any opportunity to arrest Palestinian residents.

Pictures one and two from top: Weekly demonstrations in Sheikh Jarakh protesting the takeover of this Palestinian neighborhood in Jerusalem by Israeli settlers.

3. Author David Grossman listens to Sheikh Jarakh residents with RHR Education Director Rabbi Navah Hefetz in background. 4. Activist Sarah Beninga at a Sheikh Jarrah rally in March that drew thousands of participants. 5. An Israeli settler smiles as he stands in a house after its Palestinian residents were forced out.



Other Activities

RHR facilitated fact-finding field trips to the West Bank, showing the pattern of continuous land-grabs despite the temporary building freeze, Israel's methodological domination of water resources, and settler encroachment onto Palestinian farmlands through tree-uprooting, bullying, and the use of land confiscations through archeological claims filed with the Israeli Antiquities Authority.



RHR helped combat fires and other violent activities perpetrated against Palestinians and their property by Israeli settlers' "Operation Price Tag"



Activities at this years' Jahalin Summer Camp were held at the "Tire School" to demonstrate that the school year did not technically end, thus trying to prevent implementation of the demolition order issued for the structure



Economic and Social Justice for Israelis

In what is being called the most significant Israeli social justice victory in recent years, RHR's Social and Economic Justice Department culminated a nine-year effort and defeated Israel's misguided "Israeli Wisconsin Plan". Our Women's Interfaith Empowerment Group played a key role in shutting down "Wisconsin", with Knesset members telling us afterwards that the detailed information we supplied based on our close work with "Wisconsin" victims was critical. In addition, RHR continued its role in coalition efforts to ensure economic justice in Israel's State Budget and social allocations.

Wisconsin Plan Cancelled!!

After years of relentless campaigning by NGO's, the unbelievable happened: Israel canceled the "Wisconsin Plan"!

"Wisconsin" awarded contracts to private companies ostensibly to bring the unemployed back into the workforce. Evidence indicates that the real motivation was to reduce unemployment costs to the government. The pilot program began in four experimental regions in 2005 and was modified in 2007 due to pressure by RHR and others.

The Israeli Wisconsin Plan did in fact save the government money and the companies profited. However, only about 28% of the unemployed forced into the revised program actually found jobs through it – and the majority of those

jobs were temporary or part-time employment without full social benefits. The fact is that 12,622 of Israel's poorest had their benefits cut or reduced through the often unjust policies of the "Wisconsin" companies and their control over the participants' lives. The remainder languished in ineffectual "skills-development" programs run by "Wisconsin" without gaining new employment.

To help "Wisconsin" victims in the Hadera region, RHR and the *Keshet HaDemokratit HaMizrakhit* set up the *Lev Hadera* rights center in 2005. After four years of helping hundreds of "Wisconsin" victims and conveying what we learned to decision makers, RHR was ready to respond in summer 2009 when the government tried to change "Wisconsin" from a limited pilot program into permanent and nation-wide unemployment policy.



Economic Justice Director Rabbi Idit Lev toasts victory with former Wisconsin participants.

As reported last year, RHR and our coalition partners initially countered the proposal to expand “Wisconsin” by presenting Knesset members (MK’s) with detailed information about the program’s ineffectiveness. Participants in our interfaith women’s empowerment group told their personal stories. The impact was dramatic, and helped galvanize latent cross-party and wide civil sector opposition to the plan, delaying the government’s sought-for expansion.

Another all-out effort to expand “Wisconsin” was launched in December 2009. Again RHR, our interfaith empowerment group and coalition partners managed to surprise the government. Together with the *Association For Civil Rights in Israel*, *HaKeshet HaDemokratit HaMizrakhit*, and *Singur Kehilati*, RHR published a position paper highlighting the failures of “Wisconsin”, launched a mini-website to educate the wider public, began a letter writing campaign, marshaled support from different sectors, and initiated wide press coverage including a media exposé on “skills development” courses in which participants sat idly in a room to fulfill quota hours. Despite intense pressure from the Finance Ministry, a decision on whether to expand “Wisconsin” and make it permanent policy was put off until April 2010, the expiration date for the law governing the “Wisconsin” pilot.

The atmosphere was tense as the fateful April vote neared. The Finance Ministry was adamant that “Wisconsin” be expanded. Charged with deciding whether to bring the expanded “Wisconsin” Plan to a vote in the Knesset, the Labor and Welfare Committee held its discussion behind closed doors. Our staff and anxious participants could only wait and pray. Declaring that the daily suffering of “Wisconsin” participants was unacceptable and must be stopped immediately, the committee decided to cancel the program altogether.

As with many of our successes, the danger hasn’t completely passed. The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance expressed their dismay at “Wisconsin’s” cancellation. They are expected to reintroduce “Wisconsin” with cosmetic changes in the upcoming year’s budget process. Others in the government want to introduce more far-reaching, but not necessarily sufficient, changes. Having stated what we oppose, RHR is now lobbying for what we favor in a genuine welfare-to-work program. We issued another joint position paper along with the *Keshet HaDemokratit* detailing the parameters, values, and safeguarding structure of such a program and continue to follow up on its favorable reception.



Rabbi Lev working with empowerment group participants on campaign to stop the Israeli Wisconsin Plan



From Empowerment Group Participants:

[Wisconsin's cancellation] *"was like perestroika in the U.S.S.R. I didn't think that it would ever happen to me again. I didn't believe there would ever be change in the Soviet Union, and the same here with Wisconsin. It's a miracle...Three times I went alone against those bandits in the appeals committees [appealing cuts of her benefits]...When I think of how we sat there [participants were forced to spend requisite hours in the Wisconsin centers], for four hours to look at the floor, at the ceiling. It's awful. And I can't sit for four hours [she suffers from back pain]. I'd put my foot up on the chair and they would tell me it was forbidden. I'd take the special pillow I use to sit more comfortably on the bus and go sit in the bathroom. It's terrible that somebody who has a profession and studied so many years isn't appreciated. They say, 'You are garbage. You are lazy.'"*

---A., age 55, has a university education and is a professional piano teacher unable to work in her field due to back problems. She was not offered any suitable employment through "Wisconsin".

I was there [at Hadera's "Wisconsin" center] for 5 years and 4 months. During those years I was never at home. It cost me the opportunity to educate my children. I am happy that it [Wisconsin] is over, but that won't give me back the time that I lost. I'm going to try to make up for it by educating my kids and by relearning how to run my own home...I think that the program was a grave injustice to single parents, tearing them from their children."

---K. is an Israeli Arab single mother of five children. Her 20 year-old daughter is developmentally challenged and suffers from mental illness. Including the 3 hours of travel from her village to the "Wisconsin" center in Hadera where she was required to attend "skills-development" seminars, community service tasks, and other activities that did not lead to any employment, she had to be out of the house for 9 hours a day in order to receive her monthly stipend of NIS 2,000 (about \$500).

Interfaith Women's Empowerment Group

Overcoming the challenges of language, the Palestine-Israel conflict "background noise", and the need to hold their individual lives together sufficiently to make room for RHR's interfaith women's empowerment group in their lives, the core group of 22 Israeli Jewish and Israeli Arab women from Hadera and villages in Wadi Ara, together with tens of other women involved in the groups' activities, took their fate into their hands this year and made a difference in their own lives.

The group and its activities have grown with our staff's facilitation over the last several years. The primarily Jewish group in Hadera, the Palestinian-Israeli group from Wadi Ara, and an occasional participant from Netanya have had more and more joint activities and have functioned as a single group since December 2009. They evolved from a collection of individuals who turned to us when there was no where else to go into a group that met with MKs, mayors, launched letter-writing campaigns, and petitioned Israel's High Court.

Perhaps as important as their role in defeating "Wisconsin", our group members established a remarkable relationship with one another. Discussions have to be facilitated by a translator, but the communication is real as they plan how to recruit and organize their different communities to sign a petition or attend a meeting with an MK.

Our hope is that this group can stop their activities opposing a new government welfare-to-work plan and start becoming active on other issues in their communities beyond those which affect them personally. Thanks to the support of *Kerk in Actie*, the group will begin learning details about all the social rights to which they and their communities are entitled, and expect to begin an accompaniment program for wider members of their community as they visit government and welfare services offices.

❖ Until the closing of the "Wisconsin" program in May 2010, RHR's *Lev Hadera* rights center averaged four inquiries per week from first-time victims of "Wisconsin".

❖ From January – April 2010, the center received 64 first time inquiries and 51 inquiries from repeat clients.

❖ Since May 2010 *Lev Hadera* continues to receive some two inquiries a week, both regarding rights and monies owed to former Wisconsin participants and other questions relating to work benefits and rights, such as employer-employee relations, supplementary income payments, national insurance institute rules, etc.

❖ Half of those who use *Lev Hadera's* services are native Hebrew speakers.

Education

RHR enriched its core education programs in the 2009-2010 academic year. University and pre-army academy students studied issues of Judaism and Human Rights and learned the value of social action in confronting the difficult issues facing Israeli society.

RHR also worked diligently to encounter new target audiences. We held many one-time events geared toward exposing multitudes of Israelis to our educational materials and to the notion that protection of human rights is a Jewish and Zionist value of the highest order. This outreach is essential for expanding the impact of our field-work and advocacy efforts within Israeli society as a whole.

Aiming to expand our programming in new directions, we conducted seminars for education students at the *Kibbutz Seminar College* and presented our “Tractate Independence” program at the Hakhel conference for Jewish renewal in Israel. We expect these, and similar, opportunities to facilitate entrance of our materials into Israeli schools. Two other innovative and important study days are featured below, as well as our plans to work with Jewish and Bedouin women in the Western Negev and expand our educational tours.

While our entire organization owes its existence to the vision of Rabbi David Forman z”l, David particularly devoted himself in recent years to advocating, developing and fundraising for RHR’s educational programs, particularly the Human Rights Yeshivas. He is sorely missed.

Pre-Army Academies: Encouraging Study and Leadership

RHR strengthened its relationship with nine Pre-Army Academies in 2009-2010. Approximately five hundred young people studied Judaism and Human Rights through our “Tractate Independence” programs at Ma’ayan Baruch, Kfar Hanassi, Ma’agan Michael, Ein Prat, Nachshon at Metzudat Yoav, Nachshon at Mevo’ot Hanegev, Aderet, Amichai and Mechinat Ha’Negev.

At Aderet we launched an advanced program for students who returned for a second-year of studies. At the Amichai and Ha’Negev programs, a special grant from *Kerk in Actie* allowed us to run a full-capacity program with increased numbers of classes, field trips, and volunteer activities. The educational goal of our work with these students is to ensure they have a thorough understanding of human rights obligations and values before they are conscripted into the IDF.

Utilizing our Talmudic-style commentary on Israel’s Declaration of Independence, students examine modern and classic Jewish sources in light of Israeli society today. Because the Israeli education system does not consider contemporary dilemmas from the wide perspective of Jewish sources or successfully teach skills for critical thinking, the program stresses personal and autonomous decision-making and values identification – skills essential for these young people when they become IDF soldiers.

The Pre-Army Academy program also aims to dispel the participants’ ignorance, stereotypes and

preconceptions. Each student learns about issues of economic injustice and the wide social gaps between sectors of Israeli society. Participants spend a day with RHR examining the issue of the Separation Barrier in Jerusalem, understanding the ethical dilemmas raised by its route and its impact on the Palestinian population, and considering what the Barrier expresses about us as a Jewish State in terms of our values.

The participants also meet with Palestinians expelled from their homes or facing home demolitions in Sheik Jarrah and Silwan. This human encounter with Palestinians in the east of the city and exposure to the difficulties and inequality faced by both Israelis and Palestinians on a daily basis shatters illusions and shakes up the students’ platitudes and assumptions. This tour day reveals a profound lack of knowledge among the young participants concerning Jerusalem in particular, and the year changes their perspective on social and economic issues in general.

RHR acutely senses the responsibility we have to these students and to our country to provide accurate information, to encourage these young participants to continue to explore these issues and, above all, not to accept slogans and declarations unquestioningly. In the long term, raising the issues’ complexity and discussing moral gray areas encourages the participants to be active in addressing the Palestine-Israel conflict, social justice and human rights in a meaningful way.

Human Rights Yeshivas - Batei Midrash (Houses of Study)

RHR's Beit Midrash programs, which we run in cooperation with Beit Hillel on the Hebrew University campus and at the Ramat Aviv campus of Open University, activated more than 35 university students to volunteer each week in a hands-on project protecting human rights. The students' activism was grounded in their studies about diverse issues relating to human rights in Israel: The Divine Image in Jewish Thought; Justice versus Charity and Jewish Law; The Right to Equality; Attitudes Toward the 'Other', etc.

Our faculty was headed by rabbinical student and veteran educator Natalie Lastarger and Rabbi Aharon Fox. Rabbis and teachers representing diverse streams in Israeli society, many of them RHR staff and members, also taught the students. The law, education, economics, media studies, philosophy, geography, and psychology student participants put their training and skills to good use in their volunteer activities.



Students study with RHR Rabbis at the Human Rights Yeshiva, held at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

In addition to their studies and volunteer work, the students participated in two tours. The first, entitled Tel Aviv's Back-Yard, exposed them to issues of poverty, African refugees, migrant workers and their children, prostitution, and the Arab community of Jaffa. The second tour focused on the complexity of Jerusalem, the social rifts in Israeli society, and an encounter with Palestinians in Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah.

Jerusalem Beit Midrash Alumni

To mark the seventh year of the Jerusalem Beit Midrash's founding by our rabbi and teacher Rabbi David Forman z"l, RHR brought together alumni for a study evening dedicated to Rabbi Forman's memory. Held a week before Shavuot, the Festival of the Giving of Torah, the gathering was entitled: "Na'asseh Ve'nishma - We Shall Do and We Shall Hear: A Paradigm for Contemporary Jewish Activism". More than fifty former students attended and studied issues relating to leadership, *Tikkun Olam*, and the spirit of activism reflected in Jewish sources.

The program ended with a panel discussion examining the state of Jewish activism today. The students gave moving testimony regarding the impact of the Beit Midrash on their lives, and many expressed interest in renewing their connection with RHR via ongoing study and projects.

New Directions

A study day for 11th and 12th-grade students was held at the prestigious Re'ali High School in Haifa in preparation for International Human Rights Day. Approximately 150 students attended the study day focused on racism in Israeli society. Afterward, we were invited by the principal and senior faculty to discuss how racism at the school can be reduced.

RHR has been working for years to get the IDF to include our education programs about human rights in its training courses and supplementary programs for soldiers. This year RHR ran a pilot project examining the character of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state and as a model society in the spirit

of the prophets and the nation's founders. Some eighty cadets attended the pilot program.

RHR also began an initiative to bring more Israelis and visitors to Israel on tours and field-trips looking at human rights issues through a Jewish lens. RHR conducted tens of these trips during the past year. Just as our pre-army academy and human rights yeshiva programs are designed to open students' minds and hearts, the results are similarly profound when Israelis encounter realities in their own back yard that they had remained unaware of. It is clear that we can and must do much more in the coming year both to bring Israelis into the field and to create

additional comprehensive study texts - "tractates" - out of the Jewish source materials we use on these tours. Realizing that many Israelis will not come on tours because they either fear for their physical safety or of what they might learn, we therefore hope to bring Palestinian speakers to synagogues, community centers, and other venues inside Israel.

RHR is now recruiting Jewish and Bedouin women in the Negev to be trained in human rights activism over the next three years through a new program based on the model of our "Sisters for Peace" pilot

program in East Jerusalem in 2007. In the new program, "Citizens for Equality", twenty young women will learn about human rights in Islam, Judaism, and international law and then create and run human rights projects in the Negev region. The new project will be located at Sappir College in Sderot and is supported by *Misereor* and the *Scottish Church's Women's Guild*. Academic credit will be awarded to the participants for their study, and RHR is optimistic that this accreditation will dramatically help us expand the use of our study materials and replicate our programs in other locations in Israel.

African Refugees and Foreign Workers

The government withdrew the proposed "Infiltration Law" which would have formalized the current procedure of turning refugees back at the border and imposed draconian penalties on Israelis who help refugees. Letters and other campaign support from concerned individuals abroad helped prevent the law's passage, but we fear a similar version will be reintroduced this year. RHR and coalition partners signed a letter warning the government that, unless rescinded, we will petition the High Court against a recent government decision to deny work permits to those refugees granted temporary residence in Israel. The government has given amnesty to

many children of refugees and foreign workers, but it nevertheless intends to deport some 400. In recent months "spin" has increasingly begun to replace the word "refugees" with "infiltrators" and the government speaks openly about keeping new refugees out by sealing the Sinai border with a new Separation Barrier. RHR recently wrote a rabbinic response in opposition to a halakic (Jewish legal) ruling by a group of Tel Aviv rabbis that would prohibit renting apartments to refugees or foreign workers without work visas. The Torah teaches that how we as a society treat "the Other" ultimately defines who we are as a nation.

Staff and Board

RHR welcomed new staff members Adv. Moein Odeh and Adv. Tzvi Avni to the legal team together with secretary Tiferet Kedmi, and new board members Rabbi Jonathan Chipman and HUC-JIR student rabbi Meirav Kalush.

Chaim Cohen, Mordechai Goldberg and HUC-JIR student Chaim Shalom.

RHR thanks outgoing spokesperson Noga Eitan, our full-time national service volunteer Maya Yehieli, and outgoing board members Rabbis Paul Arberman,

RHR is deeply appreciative of the many dedicated young, and young-in-spirit, volunteers who give generously of their time, energy, and advice to enable RHR to remain one of the leading activist groups in the OT and in the fight for a socially and economically just Israel.

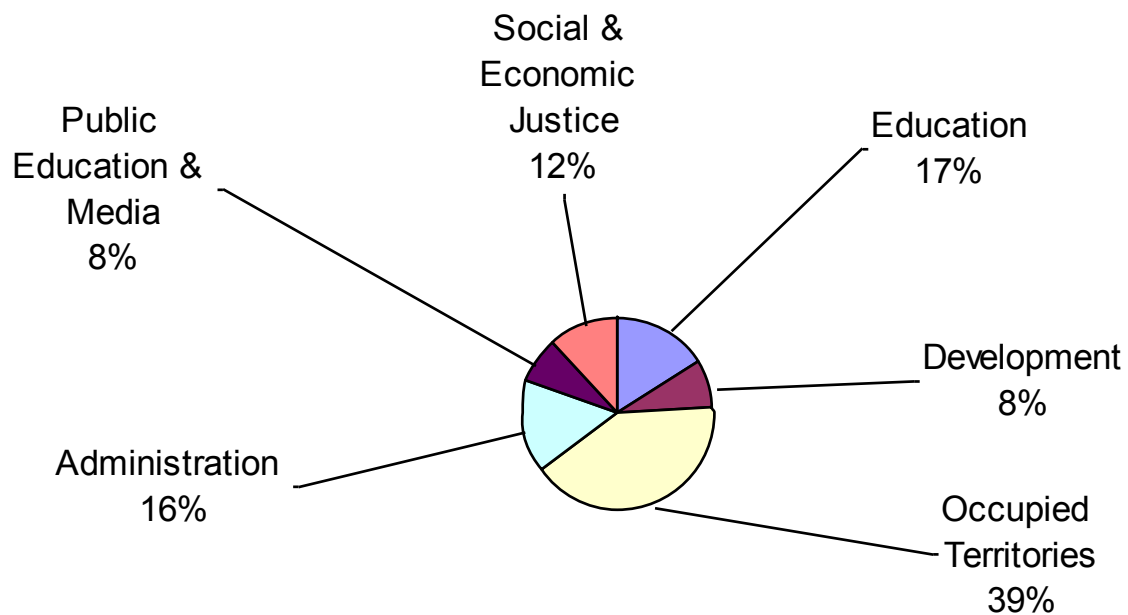
In Memorium

RHR mourns the loss of RHR founder **Rabbi David Forman** and of RHR members **Rabbi Dr. Moshe Greenberg**, **Rabbi Dr. Jacob Milgrom** and **Rabbi Moshe Tutnauer**. Please see our website to view the many thoughts and memories shared by the colleagues and students of these remarkable leaders.



Financials

RHR's 2009-2010 budget was about four million shekels, which is slightly more than a million U.S. dollars. Over the 22 years of RHR's activity, our financial capacity has continued to grow along with the expansion of our various areas of work and activity. Much has been accomplished, yet much remains to be done. RHR today employs 22 full- and part-time workers while others, including many rabbis, lecture in a variety of forums and coordinate various projects in the framework of RHR's many activity areas. In addition, RHR's many volunteers accounted for over several thousand work-hours in the past year.



Total RHR Budget 2009- ₪ 3,939,405

RHR's July 2009- June 2010 Budget

Some thirty-nine percent of RHR's budget is devoted to protecting human rights in the Occupied Territories through legal and field-work activities. Nearly a quarter of the budget supports our public education activities, media initiatives, interfaith work, and our formal educational programs, while some 12% of the budget goes to our programs in the area of social and economic justice within Israel. RHR requires eight percent of the budget for development and twice that for administrative and overhead costs. RHR's total budget in 2009-2010 was NIS 3,939,405 or a little more than one million U.S. dollars.

RHR's sources of support are varied and include international and family foundation support, major gifts from individuals, income from our education activities, tours, sale of books, membership dues and more. Besides designated support for specific programs mentioned throughout this report, RHR is especially appreciative of core support from our major foundational supporters: *The Ford Foundation – New Israel Fund Project*, *Norwegian Church Aid*, *The Swedish Church*, *Overseas Resource Foundation Limited*, and *Trocaire*. Substantial income from a wide base of supporters around the world provides us with invaluable moral support as well as critical financial assistance. RHR humbly expresses our gratitude for your partnership in our work.

Contributors

RHR wishes to acknowledge our institutional sponsors and our many individual donors, several of which have requested to remain anonymous. RHR is blessed with more contributors than we can possibly list. We value and appreciate each and every one of you, regardless of the amount of your contribution. This list contains contributions of \$360 or more received between July 2008 and June 2009 to RHR only, and does not include donations to RHR-NA for North American programs.

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Alumni from seven years of RHR's Human Rights Yeshiva program at Hebrew University meet and reconnect with study and activism.



Rabbi Reuven Hammer, Noach Salameh from the Palestinian Center for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation ; and another participant in RHR' interfaith education project.



Rabbi Ascherman, OT Director Rabbi Yehiel Grenimann (Far Right) and volunteers on the road to work day Bir al 'Id

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Rabbi Arik Ascherman is forcibly removed as the uprooting of trees in Beit Jallah continues

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RHR Field Coordinator Zakariya Sadeh negotiates access to land for Palestinian farmers.

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RHR-NA - Rabbis for Human Rights-North America

The past year was one of great transition for RHR-NA. The offices moved from Martha's Vineyard to New York City, a new non-rabbi executive director replaced our founding executive director, and we launched a new campaign to end slavery and human trafficking. It was also a challenging year in terms of work as the protection of human rights came under fire both in Israel and the U.S.

We've continued our efforts working with the National Religious Campaign Against Torture to gain some accountability for U.S.-sponsored torture arising from the "War on Terror." Progress remains slow in establishing a Commission of Inquiry to investigate abusive interrogation techniques since 9/11. The current U.S. Administration would prefer to move forward rather than dredge up the past. We however believe that acknowledgement and accountability is essential to prevent reoccurrences of torture perpetrated by our government.

We remain committed to fighting for Red Cross access to detainees, the closing of Guantanamo, and enshrining in law America's pledge never again to commit acts of torture. Following a report from Physicians for Human Rights on illegal medical research and experimentation at Guantanamo, RHR-NA and others filed a complaint alleging violations of laws and ethics by medical professionals involved in interrogations at the base. We also advocated for an end to arbitrary and indefinite detention of prisoners caught up in the "War on Terror". In some cases, the U.S. government refused to release prisoners even after federal judges ruled several times that there was no evidence to justify holding them.

At Passover, we launched the advocacy component of our campaign to end slavery and human trafficking, urging members of Congress to fully fund federal legislation on human trafficking. We also developed resources for use at the family seder that address the plague of modern slavery. We will further this campaign to encompass issues of sex trafficking, child labor, debt bondage, and other forms of slavery today.

We also continue our work educating the American Jewish community on the connection between Jewish values and human rights. One hundred congregations participated in Human Rights Shabbat 2009, which addressed issues of human rights in the context of the Hanukah

holiday. Communities around the world studied Jewish texts on slavery, used human rights liturgy in their Shabbat services, brought in speakers to talk about pressing human rights issues, and taught about human rights in their Hebrew Schools.

We hope that even more will join us this year to learn about the Jewish connections to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This year's date is December 10-11, with the alternate date of December 3-4. RHR-NA will be developing a Jewish commentary to the UDHR so that communities can explore its thematic links to biblical and rabbinic texts.

RHR-NA released a fantastic, four-part curriculum based on our ground-breaking articles on Jewish values and torture. This curriculum, aimed at high school students and above, is an interactive method of addressing key moral questions surrounding the use of torture. It includes the short film *Ending U.S.-Sponsored Torture Forever* from the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. Contact the RHR-NA office (office@rhr-na.org) for more information about either of these two programs.

In our Israel program, we advocated for an independent inquiry into the Gaza War, and now the need for an independent inquiry into the Gaza flotilla incident. We've faced attacks on Israeli civil society by groups and legislators seeking to silence critics of the Israeli government or its actions. At the same time, we continue to support the work of Rabbis for Human Rights as it fights against the erosion of Israel's democratic principles by defending the human rights of Jews and non-Jews alike.

The Board of Directors of RHR-NA recently chose housing issues in East Jerusalem as our primary focus for the near future. We've also committed to doing more online outreach and we hope you will follow us on Facebook or Twitter. We have some exciting events coming up! We continue to plan for our upcoming Mission to Israel in October and for our conference in December. The theme for this year's conference is Human Rights Under Fire: A Jewish Call to Action. Please plan to join us in New York City from December 5-7, 2010. We look forward to seeing you.

Sincerely,
Steven Gerber
Executive Director

Tractate Independence in English

Join over 100 congregations, campus groups, and others who use the English translation of our Talmudic-style commentary on Israel's Declaration of Independence. It is an integrative educational resource for teaching Israel's, and Jewish and human rights values.

PLEASE CONTACT RHR ABOUT FIELD TOURS, STUDY AND/OR LECTURES FOR GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS WHEN VISITING ISRAEL, RHR SPEAKERS VISITING YOUR COMMUNITY.

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