

Ethiopian Rabbis

Chief Kes (High Priest) of the Jews of Ethiopia,
Raphael Hadane's October 1998 Letter from Israel
to the Jewish Community in Ethiopia

Blessed Be his name
Erev (the evening) of Sukkot 5759
4 October 1998

Unto you, our brethren and of our flesh, that have left the villages to go to Gondar and Addis Ababa, we send our blessings from the Holy Land.

Our brethren, strengthen yourselves in the way of the Lord – in the way of the Torah and commandments. Cleave to the God of Israel that he will open for you the gates to return to the land of our fathers – the land of Israel.

I call upon the Jewish Agency, the joint (JDC) and the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (NACOEJ) to assist you with medical and social aid and the maintenance of a school for your children and Jewish education for you and the members of your family in order that you may properly fulfill the duties of our religion. With the Help of God the Lord of Israel who gathers the oppressed of Israel, we will be privileged to see you returning to Zion in the near future, loyal to God and the Torah of Israel.

Your friend who prays for your salvation,

*Kes Raphael Hadane
Chief Kes (High Priest) of the Jews of Ethiopia*

Letter from Kes Hadane and Kes Imharan Fikado

24 Heshvan 5759 13 November 1998

TO: The Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Binyamin Netanyahu

RE: The immigration of our Jewish Brothers who were left in Ethiopia (the Falashmura)

Shalom:

We are the leaders of the Ethiopian Jews.

We came recently from a visit in Ethiopia. We stayed for three weeks with our brothers in Addis-Ababa and Gondar. We visited their houses, spoke with them and looked at their situation. We know many of them personally for a long time. We saw their distress and came back to Israel shocked and in tears.

Our brothers, Beta-Israel, left their villages because they cannot live in the places they were born and grew up in. The gentiles grow away from them and tell them to go where they belong, to Israel. The gentiles harm them in different ways: they burn their houses, take their property by force, shoot them, and worst of all, kidnap and rape their young daughters.

Our brothers have no alternative but to run to Addis-Ababa and Gondar. In Addis-Ababa and Gondar they suffer a great deal. They do not get medical assistance. They have not enough money for food and housing. There are many sick people among them and many died recently of diseases and weakness. The situation in Gondar is worse than in Addis-Ababa.

We met the Israeli Ambassador to Ethiopia and he told us that he had been given instructions by the government of Israel not to deal with them. However, he promised that Jewish organizations would assist them on a humanitarian basis.

Mr. Prime Minister, as the religious leaders of the Ethiopian Jews, who know well our brothers for many years, and after checking the situation in Ethiopia, we cry out the following facts and demands:

- 1. Our brothers are our flesh and blood. They pray to the G-d of Israel and keep Shabbat and the Jewish Festivals. They established synagogues and*

have their hearts set on studying and fulfilling the mitzvot of the Torah. There is an active Mikve in Addis-Ababa for fulfilling the laws of purity of the Jewish family. We prayed with them and we taught them Tora and Mizvot. We cried with them in their prayers to G-d. We are certain that they will remain faithful to the Jewish tradition and will behave like all the Jews who keep the Jewish religion. We checked many families individually. They are our relatives. They belong to our community, the community of Beta-Israel. Almost all of them have parents, children, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts and other relatives in Israel.

- 2. Their situation is disastrous. They have no assistance, they suffer from sickness and death. Not only they are hurt by the gentiles, but also by the attitude of their Jewish brothers. The Jewish organizations left them and the Israeli embassy closes the gates in front of them.*
- 3. We demand to find a way to enable them to return to Israel. We were told by the embassy that there are 3,000 among them in Addis-Ababa who are entitled to immigrate to Israel by the Law of Return. However, no one gives them permission to be interviewed. In Gondar there are thousands who fulfill the requirements of the Law of Return. However, a representative of the Ministry of the Interior gets there only once in two weeks and checks only a few people each time. There, also, the doors of the office are closed to them and only the Ministry of Interior decides whom to interview.*
- 4. They must be given medical, financial and religious assistance, until they immigrate to Israel. The assistance must be given as soon as possible, so that they will not die. "Any one who saves one soul of Israel, it is as though he saved a whole world."*

G-d will bless the ones who help our brothers and bring them to their homeland, the country of Israel.

Sincerely yours,

*The Chief Kess (Rabbi) of all Ethiopian Jewry, Kess Hadane Rafael
and
Kess Imharan Fikado*

Letter from Coalition of Major Ethiopian Organizations

24 Heshvan 5759, 13 November 1998

Mr. Howard Rieger
Chief Executive Officer
United Jewish Communities

Dear Mr. Rieger:

As you know our organization represents virtually all of the major Ethiopian organizations in Israel. We have been privileged to work with United Jewish Communities on the Ethiopian National project and looking forward to continuing this productive relationship in the future.

We would like to bring to your attention in matter of great importance to all members of our community and one, which we are sure, is equally important to the United Jewish communities. Operation Promise has been providing support to approximately eight thousand Ethiopian Jews waiting to immigrate to Israel in Gondar, Ethiopia, through programs funded by NACOEJ and JDC.

While we are grateful for this assistance, there are approximately eight thousand additional Ethiopian Jews who do not receive any medical care from JDC or humanitarian assistance from NACOEJ. Consequently, there is enormous suffering among these Jews, particularly their children.

The entire Ethiopian Jewish community in Israel would be extremely grateful if the United Jewish Communities would make funds available to JDC and NACOEJ so that they can extend their medical and humanitarian programs to the Ethiopian Jews who currently are not being helped. They are an integral part of our community and many of them have first-degree relatives in Israel or in the compound in Gondar.

Thank you very much for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Avraham Neguise
Chairman of the Ethiopian Organizations Representatives Amutah Kasshun Wondie
Deputy Chairman of the Ethiopian Organizations Amutah

Dani Admassu

Member, Executive Committee of Ethiopian Organizations Representative

Itshak Dessie

Member, Executive Committee of Ethiopian Organizations Representative

cc: Barbara Ribakove Stephen Schwager Moshe Vigdor