

Katsav calls for better coordination in helping victims of terrorism; [Daily Edition]

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Abstract (Document Summary)

[Aviva Tessler], a resident of Potomac, Maryland, who teaches religious studies at a Jewish day school, was visiting Israel around Purim 2001, and together with a friend went to distribute boxes of food and candy to terror victims at Sheba Hospital in Tel Hashomer.

In America, she said, the tendency was to write a check. Operation Embrace, while happy to accept money to cover the needs of victims and their families, takes identifying with the victims a step further through direct personal connection. When in Israel, OE volunteers visit victims in hospitals, rehab centers and in their homes and remain in touch with them through frequent letters, e- mails and telephone calls.

Tessler, who led a three-generation group of volunteers to Beit Hanassi after traveling through Israel to visit victims and to bring them some tangibles as well as comfort and cheer, told [Moshe Katsav] that she would return in February for a five-month stay, when she hopes to make more and closer contacts with the various authorities responsible for the care of victims of terror so that OE can operate on a wider and more informed scale.

Full Text (606 words)

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Efforts on behalf of victims of terror should be better coordinated to avoid duplication, President Moshe Katsav told members of Operation Embrace, an American-based volunteer organization that seeks to help victims of terror and their families through personal outreach.

Aviva Tessler, one of the four founders of Operation Embrace, initiated four years ago around a kitchen table, agreed with the president on Sunday and said that although her organization had not encountered too much difficulty with Israeli welfare authorities, she knew of other organizations with similar goals that had suffered some very unpleasant experiences.

Tessler, a resident of Potomac, Maryland, who teaches religious studies at a Jewish day school, was visiting Israel around Purim 2001, and together with a friend went to distribute boxes of food and candy to terror victims at Sheba Hospital in Tel Hashomer.

When Tessler, the wife of a modern Orthodox rabbi, returned to the US, the images that she had seen in the hospital wards did not leave her. So she called together her friends Anne Clermons, Jocelyn Krifcher and Aviva Litan, and together they decided to find ways to let the victims and their families know that they had not been forgotten.

"We try to create a human side because in America it's always numbers," Tessler told Katsav. "We try to paint a face on the statistics."

From the group of four, Operation Embrace has grown to some 400 volunteers in seven states

who reach out to embrace and help approximately 1,000 Israelis.

In America, she said, the tendency was to write a check. Operation Embrace, while happy to accept money to cover the needs of victims and their families, takes identifying with the victims a step further through direct personal connection. When in Israel, OE volunteers visit victims in hospitals, rehab centers and in their homes and remain in touch with them through frequent letters, e-mails and telephone calls.

They coordinate their activities with the chief social workers in Hadassah and Rambam hospitals, and work closely with the National Insurance Institute and local municipalities in Israel.

Tessler, who led a three-generation group of volunteers to Beit Hanassi after traveling through Israel to visit victims and to bring them some tangibles as well as comfort and cheer, told Katsav that she would return in February for a five-month stay, when she hopes to make more and closer contacts with the various authorities responsible for the care of victims of terror so that OE can operate on a wider and more informed scale.

She praised the social workers with whom OE is currently working. "They are our eyes, our ears and our hearts," she said.

In expressing Israel's appreciation for this humane outpouring of solidarity, Katsav again stated the need for coordination to ensure the effectiveness of all organizations working towards improving the quality of life of those who have survived terror attacks but remain mentally and physically scarred.

Tessler said that OE is working with hospitals to facilitate the introduction of post-traumatic stress programs in the immediate aftermath of a terrorist attack.

Katsav said that while he appreciated OE's dedication and devotion, he looked forward to the day when contributions for victims of terror would not be needed.

However, he did not see this as an immediate possibility. Referring to the conflict, Katsav noted that both Israel and the Palestinians are in the throes of election campaigns. "The big question remains as to what will happen after the elections," he said. Although he believed that conciliation was reachable, there were too many impediments in the way. "We are moving from optimism to pessimism, from hope to concern," he said.

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