



Dear Members of our Board of Governors,

I am writing to update you on the fires that have been burning now for two days right outside Jerusalem, in the Judean Hills. As you may have read in the news, the fire has now consumed 5,000 acres of land since Sunday. Thousands of residents have been forced to evacuate their homes in the area, with two towns unable to return to their homes as of today. We give thanks that no one has lost their life in this fire and we pray for the safety of both firefighters and residents of the area. Having said that, we are following the news carefully as the crisis has not yet passed.

The Jewish Agency's first concern is for our programs operating in this region. The first is our youth village Kiryat Ye'arim, which is located in one of the evacuated areas. Luckily, school has not yet begun and there are no children currently living in the village. Our staff has been evacuated safely. The second program is our Kibbutz Ulpan program located in Tzuba, whose participants have been evacuated to Ulpan Etzion in Jerusalem. They have been able to resume their studies under the instruction of our wonderful staff there.

The area burning sits in the municipality of Matte Yehuda, a community partnered with the South African Jewish community and Beit Shemesh through The Jewish Agency Partnership2Gether (P2G) program. The two communities have been in constant contact as recently Cape Town suffered from terrible fires in April of this year.

We have been working closely with the Jerusalem municipality over the past two days to understand the immediate needs and how The Jewish Agency can be most helpful in assisting with this emergency. We are offering grants to those whose property has been damaged or whose businesses have been destroyed as well as to families who have been displaced because of the fires. With these grants, our intention is to allow affected Israelis to get through this difficult period knowing that Jews around the world are thinking of them as they recover and rebuild.

As part of our emergency response in Israel, we are working with the municipality and the Matte Yehuda P2G partnership to create a course to train volunteer firefighters. Those volunteers will both support professional firefighters during times of emergency and train residents in how to respond/react. We are unfortunately learning that fires are something we will increasingly need to contend with in the future and our goal is to strengthen the resilience of the local residents.

I will continue to update our partners and the Board of Governors as we learn more about the situation. We pray these fires will be extinguished quickly.

Sincerely,

Amira Ahronoviz
Director General and CEO
The Jewish Agency for Israel