

Meeting, Tuesday, July 14, 2009
22 Tamuz, 5769

**Governmental Commission of Inquiry
Regarding the Authorities' Treatment
of the Evacuees of Gush Katif and Northern Samaria
[Excerpts]**

Members of the Committee:

Committee Head: The Honorable Eliyahu Matzav, Deputy to the President of the
Supreme Court (Retired), Professor Yedidya Stern, Dr. Shimon Ravid

Today's Witnesses:

Eliyahu Askozido

Ayal Itzhaki

Yosef Yishai

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon

Witness, Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon, has been warned and testifies:

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

We have the preliminary testimony, as well as the addendum. Perhaps you can briefly introduce yourself, mainly for the protocol, and tell us in what context you are appearing before us.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Firstly, greetings, and my apologies for the misunderstanding, we thought our fax said 2.30, there must have been a misunderstanding regarding the starting time.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

We had no complaint against you. Our summons procedure was not functioning so well.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

In any case, I will tell you where I just came from, which should be sufficient explanation about my background.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Please.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I was originally asked to come at 10 a.m., but I could not come at that time, I was scheduled to lecture at Binyanei HaUma in front of hundreds of women. I don't often lecture before audiences of women, only on this occasion, on a matter pertaining to Jewish law (halacha). My field in no way relates to employment (at least never has in the past), and I am not from Gush Katif. I am the community rabbi of Alon Shevut (south), and a Rabbi/teacher at a Hesder Yeshiva, Yeshivat Har Etzion.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

There is an Alon Shevut north and south?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Alon Shevut South is a new neighborhood, around ten years old. Additionally I teach in a Hesder Yeshiva. I love writing, which did not do much for me here, but I write about matters relating to Torah, Talmud or Jewish law. I try to understand the depths of these subjects, and present them in a user-friendly way. I wrote a book for soldiers about keeping halacha in the army, I wrote a book about the laws of *Shmitta*. This was an idea which branched out into other things that I will discuss soon, but the concept is flow-charts, tables, and basically making the information user-friendly, without compromising the depth. I don't write just the bottom-line law, but I write explanations, sources, and the logic behind each law.

You must be wondering how I got involved with the subject matter we are dealing with now. First of all, I have to say you deserve a lot of credit for your important work, it is not simple to spend so many days investigating Gush Katif.

On the 10th of Av, 5765, the day of the Disengagement, I received a phone call from rabbis in Gush Katif, who asked me to go explore the situation in the hotels, and see how the evacuees could be assisted.

I contacted the Hyatt, and spoke with one of the managers, a very nice woman who I kept in touch with later on. In the span of a short conversation, I came to realize that they were not well prepared. I asked her what they are doing about laundry. She said: "This is a hotel, we don't do laundry."

I said, "Listen, people are coming here with kids, you have to have a laundry service, who knows how long they are going to stay here?"

She replied: "They are only going to be here for 12 days, they don't need a laundry service."

I said, "Listen, we are just after the nine days of mourning. Religious people don't do laundry on these days." I saw I had no choice but to do something. I asked: "What about the kids?"

She replied, "There is a playroom in the hotel."

I asked her how big it was.

She said, "I don't know, but it's there."

I went there and saw there was indeed a playroom—it was about the size of the playroom in my house— but there were hundreds of kids. I started gathering more information, for example, the kashrut standards in the hotel. The hotel was kosher, but some people only eat Mehadrin. When we invite someone to our home, if he is vegetarian, we do not serve them meat... When you invite someone, you have to be prepared for their needs.

There were so many things, such as activities for kids, which were not arranged in advance.

In light of all of this, I held an emergency meeting in Alon Shevut to come up with a plan to try and help these people. At the time, I did not envision that four years down the line, I would be sitting here or be dealing at all with issues about Gush Katif. Thank God, I am

very busy from morning to evening. I figured we would go see what the situation was at the hotels. I put together a work plan that day; this is what you have before you. This is a work plan I put together with my wife about what had to be done, how to greet the evacuees... You can't sing [to welcome them], so there should be signs saying "We love you", and "Gush Etzion loves the people of Gush Katif", "We support you!"... i.e. no singing. Then there were practical and psychological details: How to greet them, what to do when they enter the hotel. I asked 70 women to bake cakes, and put a note on each, for each family that arrived at the hotel. Some families arrived at 2-3 in the morning, and I must say the Sela administration greeted them kindly, but there was one person receiving hundreds of people... it was impossible.

We sometimes sat with people for 6-7 hours before they received keys to a room. The people in charge were given the impossible task of greeting them, but we felt we had to greet them, sit with them. We set a station with food and drinks, and arranged a "buddy family" for the evacuated families. We had families sitting there all night like guards, so when a family arrived, they were not alone. We waited there because we didn't know when people were arriving. This turned into taking care for all sorts of needs-- for babies, children and teens, and daycare. I enlisted all of the preschool teachers and school teachers I knew and told them: This year, there is no vacation. There were teachers as well as other professionals, doctors of all disciplines: dentists, gynecologists, and psychologists. I have lists which I submitted to the committee about all of these volunteers, and what the needs were. This was just the beginning. I wrote another document with contact names.

These people arrived from another area in the country. They didn't know the area. They were not given a map of the area, where the hotel was located, where they were at that exact time. Perhaps a woman needs to immerse in the *mikveh* that night, or in the nights to follow, and she has no idea where to go, and they have no phone numbers. Where are the synagogues in the area? As hard as the situation is, the landing should be made as easy as possible.

This is what got me in. I held a meeting with hundreds of people in Alon Shevut, followed by the recruitment of thousands of volunteers across the country. That was the beginning.

The hotels were an amazing story in itself. There is a lot to say about the stay at the hotels... I noticed that no one spoke about this period. The time spent in the hotels was complex, difficult, and charged. I sat twice, for several hours, with State Comptroller Prof. Micha Lindenstrauss three years ago and again, two and a half years ago. I gave him the information, handed in a report about emotional problems caused by the stay at the hotels and what went on there. There is a lot to tell, but I think employment is our main issue now, so I will not go into that.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

Indeed.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

But allow me to give three examples, briefly. Firstly, as I described earlier, there are hundreds of people and volunteers greeting families. There are people waiting for hours with no solution because even though she [the hotel manager] is a nice woman, she can't provide solutions for everyone on her own.

Secondly, regarding the arrival, the buses were supposed to arrive in 1-1.5 hours, but in reality took 7-13 hours to arrive. People sat waiting on the buses with kids! When I take a two hour trip with my kids, I plan ahead and prepare. You don't go unprepared and empty-handed. There was nothing on the bus, no social worker... only a police officer. Nothing was provided to assist the children deal with so many hours on the bus. Ten to thirteen hours became standard.

Other than that, I heard some awful testimonials, such as one bus, no social worker, only a stressed policeman who was afraid that people would run away, so he didn't let anyone get off...not even to go to the bathroom. There was a pregnant woman there who soiled herself on the bus. This is one of many shocking accounts. You can hear this, and other shocking accounts about the first days in the hotels.

So there is a lot to say about the hotel period, but as I said, we are here for the issue of employment, even though I spent 6 months dealing with the hotel issue, and documenting the problems in the Hyatt Diaries.

I would get back home at 2 am and document what happened that day. These are issues that must be examined, if God forbid something like this ever happens again, we can learn from here what not to do. There was a young couple who asked me shyly two months afterwards. They said that they wanted another room, but they wouldn't allow it. They had two kids who were 4 and 6, and the hotel gave them one room because that's what they had. "But Rabbi", they said, "For two months, we have not lived as husband and wife. For two months we have been living in one room with our kids."

The reality was not a ten day reality; it was 6 months. Every couple of weeks, the evacuees were informed that they were moving in 10 days, but then the plans were changed on the 9th night. In the meantime, 4 and 5 year olds are regressing and wetting their beds at night out of anxiety.

This is all very sad, and should be looked into. I have a lot to say on the matter, and it pains me to say, I love this country and I love the IDF. I, myself served in the reserves. I was recently discharged, but these inhumane stories should not be ignored by any country... certainly not a country like Israel.

Humanistic issues such as these should concern and unite everyone. It makes no difference who or where you are. I love this country, and I want to see it become more humane. I must say if I had heard about anyone being treated this way, including gentiles, I would speak up. This is completely inappropriate, and particularly when dealing with people who were forced to leave their homes due to the government's

decision, I think this is very sad. I have a lot of material on this, but I think we will stop here, and move on to the issue at hand, employment, if I have your permission.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

If you will, I do have one question on this matter.

From your description as well as your written testimony, you ask yourself, why in the world would people act this way? Didn't you have anyone to turn to, to make a change? They were not in the hotel 6 or 10 days, they were there for several months, and no one was aware of the fact that the attitude could be changed?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Excellent question. Excellent question.

Regarding the hotels, and the buses- it was too late. Nothing could be done.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

Buses are one day.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

There was nothing I could do, it was several days, but there was nothing I could do.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

But every time they are told they are moving on in ten days, to change the plan on the ninth night, why?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I'll tell you. Firstly, I was in touch with Sela and to this day am in contact with them, as well as the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor (ITL), and all of the authorities. I am connected and have a good relationship with them. I am not a man of war, I am a man of love, and I have to say that in years I have not said what I am saying here because I don't like to speak in this way. It's the worst when I am fundraising abroad because people ask what's wrong. I say to myself, I'd rather forgo the half a million dollars and not speak ill of my land, giving other Jews good reason not to come here. But this is all an aside, the reality is that I have a good relationship with the powers-that-be. Some things were changed, and some remained the same. It took me several days to convince them that they had to take care of the laundry situation. Over the first few days we were taking the laundry to Alon Shevut, folding it ourselves and returning it to each family. This is also not so comfortable for self sufficient families, but what could you do.

After a few days, maybe ten, some arrangement was made and the laundry situation was taken care of.

Regarding other issues, activities were eventually arranged through the Ministry of Education, who utilized our involvement. We worked together, but it took time to organize the situation, and sometimes you discover it's too late.

Regarding the hotels, I don't know, I ask myself how anyone thought it would be a matter of 12 days, and then 2 weeks and after that... how this is possible. Today you look back, it seems ridiculous. Even when I say this to the Gush Katif people, they cannot remember. They say, it must have been 12 days...It must have been. Nothing else seems logical.

When I spoke to them at the time, it seemed everything was in place. When I approached them they said the caravans are in place, and the move will happen any day.

"I have no way of knowing", "I am in a hotel", "I am out of the hotel", "I have no idea"... Those were the answers. The people [in charge] didn't exactly know either. A lot of the people I spoke to are good people, perhaps they thought things would go faster, I have no idea. The reality was that every couple of weeks they were told two more weeks, that was the reality, that was the war we fought. It was a struggle. Speaking to people, speaking to MK's and trying to get them to use their influence, to give a little more time. I tell myself, perhaps it's better to say: There is no more time. NOW. What do we do now? Where do we go? This really seems strange, a question without an answer. So moving onto employment?

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

Yes.

The Honorable Elivahu Matza, Chairman:

Yes, please.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

On the very first days, as I accounted in the Hyatt Diaries, I wrote that the problem of employment is going to be severe. All of these working people who are now unemployed, and have nothing to do. I see families falling apart, and I write there that we have to look for someone to take hold of the employment situation.

I never dreamed that this person would be me. It was not a thought.. Not an inkling. I just did my best to connect people with the appropriate authorities, to see what could be done.

I saw people who love to work sitting day in day out in the hotel, doing nothing; the spark in their eye went out. I said: Something must be done about this, this has to be resolved. Anyone I turned to said: Look, they are still in the hotels, how can you look for work for someone living in a hotel? I said: Let's find them temporary work. Let them do something. They said: Temporary work? How can we find temporary work for this many people? I told myself I have to do something about this.

I sat at home and thought, how can I find temporary work, right away, for a large number of people? Suddenly I realized, it's Elul, Tishrei is around the corner, the Sukka market is about to become an excellent source of temporary work two months before the holiday. I spoke with Sukkot Yerushalayim, and in one day arranged temporary work for 17 people.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

How many families were at the Hyatt?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

The Hyatt had close to 100, but I slowly became acquainted with the situation in all the Jerusalem hotels, so it became...

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

In Jerusalem?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

In Jerusalem, and later in Ashkelon, and then pretty soon I was in touch with hundreds of families. It happened pretty fast. The Hyatt was a special story. I have the list here. So Sukkot Yerushalayim... I have a list of [evacuee] contacts, and every few days I call someone up with a job placement. I am doing all this from home or the hotel, I have no office, but once I see that people began working, I see the spark has returned to their eyes, I see people differently, and this urged me to do more.

I decided I have to take the issue of employment upon myself.

I did this because I felt I had no choice, not because I wanted to, or because I had time on my hands, or because I knew anything about employment. I just saw all these amazing people wasting away, and no one dealing with the real issues.

Later, of course, I developed relationships with ITL and other authorities, but this was much later. In any case, this was what got me into the world of employment.

I sat there, with no specific knowledge about employment, but just like studying a *sugya* from the Talmud (a Talmudic passage), I tried to figure out the problem in a logical way, thinking about why the Gush Katif evacuees could not find employment, and figure out possible solutions. I made a flow chart with questions and possibilities, and created a system of employment on paper. I started recruiting volunteers. I called friends across the country, and recruited 150 volunteers. We spread out to search for employment. We took the volunteers and put together a website called "JobKatif" with 1500 job listings. The site includes various links for the people of Gush Katif to search for job listings. That was the beginning, and we were able to help some people in this way.

Slowly, however, I discovered the problem is more complex. I saw that even if jobs exist, you have to get people to come, make the match work, and help them get on their feet. Our Sages teach us that a prisoner cannot release himself. A person who is imprisoned needs someone on the outside to pull him out. The same applies to these people. I got volunteers to help people apply for jobs and accept job offers. All of this is

written down. I have it all documented, and I will show you some of the information later on.

We gave out forms that said, "Circle one of these five criteria for the type of work you are looking for," and we offered them jobs. This was also not enough. These were people who had not written a CV in thirty years, so we had to help with that. I gave the volunteers a course on writing a CV, and they sat and wrote CV's for people. Then we realized that we needed training courses. At the time there was no one to speak with, there were no courses, and there was no money... nothing. I went from place to place, finding existing courses. Over time, some courses opened their doors to us, but today it's been 18 months since anything has been offered. All of this was run voluntarily, all money from donors.

If I take the *Shmitta* year as an example, throughout the year I gave around 100 classes throughout the country. Each class was attended by hundreds of people. There were 600 people at Heichal Shlomo in Jerusalem. I told them: "Don't pay me a dime. This is free, just help the people of Gush Katif." I collected money this way, and was able to begin giving courses, and getting them settled into new jobs.

Still this was not enough. A student of mine from the States called me and asked me to come and officiate at his wedding. I am thinking, can I leave my community, my wife and six kids? I realized, this is just what I have to do, go to America. I went and officiated at the wedding, and then spent a few days fundraising in several communities. While I was there, one of the most difficult things came up while I was sitting with

people. I told them I need money for employment. They felt uncomfortable asking since I'm a rabbi and they didn't want to call me a liar, but they gently said, you know, the government said there is a solution for each settler who is an evacuee, a job for every evacuee...

I went to a very wealthy man, sat with him, urging him to help. He said, you know, Ariel Sharon was here a few weeks back, he said everything is under control, they don't need help. What could I do? I showed them the disc I received a few months back from Shimon Peres, the President's Award, not that I need this award, but to show them that people understand that this was the reality, and that the situation was very difficult. So I returned with money, and was able to help, and to this day we distributed funds to this cause amounting to 15 million shekels, no small amount. But all of this money was just for courses.

The courses were also not enough. Some people wanted to start businesses like the ones they had. This was another process, and more money, but here we needed professional help. We got some volunteers, and other paid help, to help people get their businesses established. Soon I will go into the details of what the government gave and which laws were passed, but I will point out that we are dealing with people with major problems, who were sitting at home 6 months or a year. One of the ITL officials said to me: If I was sitting at home unemployed for three months, you would find me divorced. I hope other people are not like me. But this was not simple. You're sitting at home, traumatized, it

takes a toll, families are falling apart, children are hurt, and as time goes by, the earth is burning, and more has to be done.

Over time I found myself hiring psychologists to fix the situation. In some cases this came before dealing with unemployment, to repair the situation. We went from house to house, figuring out the specific need...That is what is unique about the way we work: This is not an office where people come, receive a job offer and go reluctantly to work. We accompany them personally, we go into their houses, strengthen them, motivate them, and accompany them. Someone who doesn't find work in twenty places can find a job on his 21st try. You have to help and motivate them, and that is basically how we work. This is what got me into the issue of employment.

I can continue on, or speak about specific issues, problems, solutions, or businesses.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Perhaps we should be more focused, tell us about your contact with government offices regarding the issue of employment.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

OK.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

At some point it was up to the Sela Authority, and later on, the responsibility for employment was handed over to ITL. What was your connection? How was the cooperation? Did they help you? Did they not help?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I must say, with both offices, I had a good relationship and cooperation. In other words, we always worked together, and there was a good connection. It began with the center in Ashkelon, with Avi Duan. After him there was Zigadon. I was on good terms with all of them. Regarding *Minhelet Sela*, I didn't really find a contact there, but over time things developed naturally. At first, slowly, and then things evolved. Eventually I had positive communication with everyone involved. I'll say one thing and then I'll explain: the *Minhelet* was not so involved with the employment issue.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Right.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

But there were certainly things they [the Sela Administration] contributed, but on a more minor scale compared to the extent of the problem. Not because people did not want to help, but because they lacked the tools to help in the ways that were needed. I will explain...

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Yes, please elaborate on that.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I think one of the main problems is that a state of emergency cannot deal with bureaucracy. These two cannot relate to each other. During the Disengagement, the government knew this well, and one of the reasons the Disengagement was successful, from the perspective of the government, is that there was not bureaucratic system to investigate. What went on there was a catastrophe. Anyone who investigates the bureaucracy involved will discover a catastrophe. Spending millions was approved in a moment, among so many other details. Some details are well known, others not so well known, but in a matter of minutes or hours, things were approved with no bureaucratic investigation. That was why they were able to disengage.

The emergency was rebuilding, rehabilitating... This, on the other hand, was done bureaucratically. There were some good ideas. An office was opened in Ashkelon, but at the end of the day, bureaucracy. You have to fill in paper work, which is time consuming, and there are bureaucratic issues, so a state of emergency and bureaucracy do not go together, not in any country in the world.

Even the United States doesn't know what to do in a state of emergency. They didn't know what to do in New Orleans. There is one difference: America did not create the situation in New Orleans, they were hit by a state of emergency. Israel created the Disengagement from Gush Katif. When you create the emergency, you should know in

advance what the solutions are, especially if you declare in advance that you promise solutions. No one knew. I didn't know either – they said there was a solution for every settler, a job for every evacuee. I was also naive enough to think that this was the case. But there was no preparation at all for the situation, and it was an impossible and unrealistic goal, finding a job for each and every evacuee.

There is an office, but there are also people who want to work, you want to place thousands of people. To achieve this goal you need to work with hundreds of people, not with a handful. Hundreds of people. You approve courses more openly, create courses based on individual needs. In the first couple of years, the courses offered were very general.

I told them: in Nitzan 50 women took a course in cosmetics. I said: How many pimples will it take in Nitzan to provide employment for so many cosmeticians? You cannot provide so many people in one place with the same profession! I did not say this as someone who understands employment... You don't have to have a degree to look at the reality, which was impossible. But that was their method, to try and stick people in wherever they could. People started working and left, in despair. There was no work. They studied, but there was not necessarily any employment to back up the courses. This was a huge problem.

This is only part of the initial bureaucracy. Some things changed with Zigadon, but others remained frozen and basic, and I will give one example of this.

The government decision from January 1, 2006, regarding Act 4476 from November 28, 2005, how long ago was that? Three...

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Three plus.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

And a half.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

They instructed the Ministry of Building and Housing to plan a small temporary building for small businesses in the location of temporary housing in Nitzan.

So there was this plan to put up a temporary building for around twenty businesses. We spoke with ITL and Raanan Dinur, and they told us that the building would only take a month to construct since it is a temporary trailer (caravan). This was meant for the people of Gush Katif and Nitzan-- one thousand of people who worked in this area. They came to speak to me, and asked me what they should do. I told them that one month from now there would be a commercial/shopping center, and twenty places for jobs. This did not resolve the situation, but it was a start.

I don't know if there was anyone in Nitzan, but to this day this "business center" has not been built. There is a supermarket, but no employment center. This was always underway. Gentlemen, in process... we are always in process, but throughout this process, people are homeless, waiting, sitting at home, families falling apart, no money, no income, and no house. People who were independent contractors became beggars, it's unbelievable.

People came to me crying, people who never depended on a living soul, and when I show up, they say, these are the people who used to give donations, and now they have fallen into despair. Bureaucracy is important at normal times, but not during an emergency. During an emergency, you open your arms, overcome the obstacles, overlook permits and paperwork, and let things go. The measures were temporary anyway, just let people work and see what happens. That's one example.

I'll give another example. This Cabinet decision I just mentioned-- to instruct the Zionist Federation and similar organizations to assist in the construction of new businesses— allotted no more than \$20,000 per unit. A wonderful idea. People want to open a new business, and you give them \$20,000. This is a correct read of the map, understanding that many people in Gush Katif are not officially certified, but were amazing at what they did, and today it's difficult to find a job without a degree... It's even harder for those over 40-45, almost impossible. But these people are talented. Help them start their own business, a great concept.

However, there are several obstacles. I am reading the biggest one. Obstacle number 1: This help is not offered to people in the agriculture industry. Put that aside. Number 2: This option is geared for people in areas which are considered top national priority. Take a look at the data, and you'll see that this is only applicable to a very tiny percentage of the Gush Katif population.

I took this information to the *Minhelet* and everyone else: ITL, the Director-General, anyone I could speak to, and asked: What do we do? Did you know that Nitzan is a development town in the worst condition out of the entire country? Is that not a national priority? The people of Gush Katif should be a national priority. We threw people out of their homes, they are unemployed, and this is a national priority! They all said: You're right. Each and every one of them agreed with me. We will look into it, we will try to change, and we will announce that the people of Gush Katif are a national priority. To this day, nothing has changed. Not because there was no desire, but because bureaucracy is complex. If you want to succeed in an emergency situation, ignore bureaucracy. If you want to lose, go with bureaucracy. There was no chance. There is no chance.

Here is an example about the businesses. Regarding employment, until today we have found employment for 1,100 people and opened 160 businesses. 111 were opened with a large grant and instruction from the outset. We helped other businesses throughout the process. I will show you the businesses we helped soon, but I don't know if the judges are interested in the lists... May I? I will put it on the board.

This is a list of 111 businesses. On the left, the type of business: Taxi cab, candy store, tropical fish, marketing, clothing, tractors, honey, greenhouses, driving schools, here on the left is the list. You see there are a variety of types. They were each given a grant of \$25,000 or \$15,000, which was based more or less on the government decision. The only difference is that I arranged the grant money, which was donated.

Please understand, all of these businesses were created by people who would otherwise be sitting at home, not earning any money, relying on government funding and requiring thousands of shekels each month or collecting unemployment, and then Bituach Leumi. These are people who become a burden on society. I will show you what happens on the other side.

We helped open these businesses, but we did not distribute money freely. We sat and worked out business plans, looked into the details, the money was distributed in stages, and we supervised the business later on in the process as well. There was one businessman, an American, who came to check things out. He said: Tell me how you work, and how many of your businesses got off the ground? This is after three years. I told him, 94%. He said: Impossible. Impossible! So I showed him the data. He said, statistically, 50% of businesses crash in the first year.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

You are telling us that out of 160 businesses, 94% are still going?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

This is out of 111. I will discuss the rest soon.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

111 is enough for me.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Yes. The failed attempts usually related to domestic problems, sicknesses, or someone who fell into the hands of a scammer. These are the types of problems. Just so you understand, other than this, the added value to the country. When I approach the government asking for money for this initiative, the amounts are minute compared with our output. I will give you one example.

If these Gush Katif businesses had not opened, all of these people would be sitting at home; burdens on society. Look at this chart, at the actual financial projections for the first year, see this?

Put this all together and you arrive at a combined income of 46 million shekels. Instead of these people becoming a burden and costing the country millions, they become a productive force. Forty-six million shekels is the yearly income of all of these businesses put together, annually. This is a blessing for the country regardless of Gush Katif. Gush Katif is an added issue, but this is a blessing.

I have to say this is also with a lot of help from above. We are not that smart... You try and help, your heart is in the right place, but there is assistance from above, and Thank God you have a full account of the businesses, including their balance, and they basically do not need us anymore. At a certain point, we become obsolete.

This is a great example of working with and without bureaucracy. It's a different world. I am not here to lay the blame, I am on good terms with the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor, as well as the Employment Agencies, but when you lack the tools, what can you do?

They give you bureaucratic tools, telling you to use them to help. So you can do a little more, make it a little better, but you cannot accomplish something substantial. Often, the Employment Service Bureau would turn to us for help with issues they could not deal with bureaucratically at the time. For the past year and a half, no one has been out there but us. This is another example of the type of work we do, and why it is so different from regular bureaucratic work.

Other issues relate to different fields, as we saw here, and job placements. With placement you could...

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

What is this 'Legacy'? I know what it means in English but what does it do?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

This is a donor we are very grateful for...

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

It's the name of a fund?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Yes. They inspected our organization thoroughly, and are very pleased with our work...

There are many other donors. You know today that the situation is much more complex, I will get to that at the end, but the situation in the US affects us as well.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

111 businesses or 164 businesses is in fact, when I go over the list, the typical work performed by MATI, is it not?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I will explain the difference. When we are able to work with MATI, we do so. There is a big difference between us and MATI.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

Again, they are a bureaucracy and you are... ?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

You're not even close. They give great business advice, that's all.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Advice, but they don't give any money.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

They don't give any grants.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

But there is a fund for small businesses.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

A fund for businesses means loans, or in rare cases, when there is a cause that is a national priority, the loan is provided by the government. However, their standard procedure is only loans. Usually this means loans with interest, which the Gush Katif people cannot handle in their current situation. This is not at all similar to the grant and help we offer. They offer a few hours of business counseling.

We are talking about an investment of tens or hundreds of hours when we accompany the business. This is not only counseling, it's getting things going, and accompanying them after they have opened the business, etc.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

Who does that?

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Who?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

This is a service offered by our volunteers, or the JobKatif staff which includes 15 professionals. Since the crash in the US stock market, we were supposed to receive money from two donors, one of them offering \$300,000, for this purpose. You probably heard about the Madoff scam, what he did...

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

We heard, we heard.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

The day after it crashed, they called and said: "We have no money. It's all gone." When they crashed I had to let people go and cut funds because everything we do is based on donations.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

The staff was paid?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I'll explain.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

This is other than the volunteers.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

At first it was all done on a voluntary basis. Slowly, when I saw that the need was for real professionals, for the psychological side of things and the business side, I brought in more professionals. There are still a few volunteers.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

How many employees do you have today?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I'll tell you. Up until a few months ago there were 15. Technically that is our staff. Now we let some people go because we are low on funding. But we strive to go back to 15 because that is the normal staff working with the businesses.

The Honorable Elivahu Matza, Chairman:

How many are there today?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Today there are ten. I had to let five go, I had no choice. I can't hire someone if I cannot guarantee that he will get paid.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Is JobKatif an organization, a corporation...?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

JobKatif is the organization I started. I am the Chairman, I work voluntarily. This is a fund which is recognized by the state.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

In other words, donations to JobKatif are tax deductible?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Tax deductible, yes. All donations to JobKatif are tax deductible, in Israel and in the States. Most of our staff today is paid, although we also have some volunteers. There is one in particular I wanted to mention, Avery Harris, who at the age of 60, decided to leave his business and be with us day in and day out, six days a week. He works for us voluntarily. That's just one example. Other people are with us all the time as well, and some of course have to get paid.

Prof. Yedidya Stern:

Rabbi Rimon, according to this data there are 111 businesses which provided employment for 250 people.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

That is an important point; I will deal with that in a moment.

Prof. Yedidya Stern:

I want to understand the economic significance, so that we could examine future implications, since at the end of the day we want to look to the future. Let us assume that the cost of 250 employees, if we look at the grants, this means, \$1 million, for arguments' sake.

What I fail to understand is the cost of this achievement, on top of the grants. You had overhead, naturally.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

True.

Prof. Yedidya Stern:

Do you have an estimate?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I have all the details, and I will present them shortly, but the cost relates also to our other activities, since our staff deals with several different areas. Can I show you in a moment?

I want to go over the data and then I will show you. I just want to relate this important fact, that opening a business usually means the ability to employ another evacuee.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

Of course.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

And you can see in this column the number of Gush Katif employees.

So, every time Gush Katif people open a business, others are employed, in other words, I say to people, you want help? You have to promise you will employ someone from Gush Katif, if they are suitable. If they are not suitable, you don't have to take them. But this also helps with the matter of employment.

Prof. Yedidya Stern:

There is an interesting phenomenon here which I can understand, but will point out anyway: these are all tiny businesses.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

True, almost all of the businesses are small businesses. Larger businesses, \$20-25,000, will not receive our help; I don't need to throw money away. I want to assist with something stable. I strive for the day when a person no longer needs my help, where he

can provide for his family. I am not interested in keeping people on, and my goal is not to create millionaires. I want a person to make a comfortable living so he is not a burden on society. This was my goal; although I do help farmers and other people in bigger businesses, but there the situation is more complex, and our financial assistance is less significant. Perhaps a little more, but not much.

Prof. Yedidya Stern:

Do you feel the main issue here is the cost of the grant and the personal accompaniment?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Yes.

Prof. Yedidya Stern:

These are the two most substantial things.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

The cost of the grant and the personal accompaniment, true.

Prof. Yedidya Stern:

Where, if at all, do you deal with placement, not in the context of creating a new business?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

We deal with this quite a bit. So let's speak about job placement.

Job placement is our central goal. We only started dealing with businesses after the Cabinet decision. Job placement was what we started out doing on the website, since finding work is not easy. How do you create jobs? You call all kinds of people. You advertise in newspapers, such as Makor Rishon, and write that JobKatif is seeking employment for Gush Katif evacuees. This was the initial channel. We put out lots of those advertisements. Makor Rishon published them for free.

I have to say that is no small thing. No one else offered to do this other than Makor Rishon, no religious or secular organization. We appreciate that. Once we started with businesses, we felt obligated to help them sustain themselves, which takes money for advertising as well. We advertise what they are, what they do, where they are located, phone numbers, we try to get people to buy from them. We also asked possible employers to advertise on our site.

This helped at first, later we saw there was a need to do this professionally. We needed help writing CVs, some for people who had never even had a CV.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Yes, you said that, but...

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Other than that...

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Regarding placement.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I am speaking about placement now.

People think if you hand over a list of jobs to Gush Katif evacuees, they will find work.

It's not that simple. We go and sit with someone, to try and arrange employment. First we try to get him to the "Eight State." What this means is, sometimes we come and see a person is not ready for work. We will find him a job, but he'll leave in a month. We might have done everything right technically, but it's not good for just anyone. First we need to strengthen him emotionally. At first it was about finding jobs and placing people, then it was about the CV, but now it's sitting with people, figuring out where they are, helping them find that balance that allows them to even go to work.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

Naturally, the harder cases are left.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

It's the more difficult cases to begin with, and after three years of sitting at home, each becomes even more difficult, and age is a factor, what can you do? Years go by and you get older.

The Honorable Elivahu Matza, Chairman:

How many people are we talking about? Who are still looking for work or are unemployed?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

There are 790 people still looking for employment today, but the details are a little more complicated: There are 529 people who are not working at all. 181 people are currently attending our training courses, but we need to find them employment once they are done. These 181 are working part time, which is nice, but does not adequately support one's family. This accounts for 700. The additional 90 are retired who we technically do not deal with, but some are pretty young and their pension plan is not enough for them to live on. They also want to find employment.

So including all of the above there are 790. We approach people, talk to them; try to bring them to a good place emotionally. Then we try and look seriously into their employment needs. Do they need a training course? If so, in what field? This is a difficult task.

The simple tendency is to take the field they were employed in previously, but this is not always right. Sometimes they need something else. Not only are their needs taken into account, but the needs of the country as well. This too is a difficult task.

After a course, we need to find them employment. We have contact people who make all kinds of promises to businesses who are willing to employ Gush Katif evacuees. Sometimes it's accompaniment, sometimes a grant which will cover a person's salary for the first few months to get them to go to work. A person who was making 15,000 shekels as an independent contractor in Gush Katif, but has been unemployed for three years runs out of money. He wants to work, but can't open a business; his head is not there. You offer him a job for 3,500 shekel working from 8am-4pm. Why would he agree? He is not used to having someone above him telling him what to do, and is insulted by an offer of a 3,500 shekel income. We say to a person like that, we will add 2,000 shekels a month to your salary in the first year. After a year, he knows his coworkers, likes the job, and so once he is settled, things will look different. Our experience is that employers love our people. I just received an SMS a few weeks ago, thanking me for one of the people I placed: "He is a great worker, thank you so much." At first, employers are reluctant to take in someone who is not certified or over 45... it's complex. Placement is difficult; it's hard to convince businesses. Sometimes giving an employee more money at first just to get him into the working mode will lead to a process of independence, and then he no longer needs us.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

What happened to the matching agreement with the government?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I will tell you.

The government set aside 43 million shekels; I have the exact numbers for employment for Gush Katif evacuees. They utilized half of this budget, and then a little more, 43 is the amount, but these are laws I also had to learn and I have yet to master. I think it's right.

In any case, I think there are around 18 million left, as far as I know. I don't know everything. Years ago I received a letter from Gabi Maimon, I'll see if I have it here, "Dear Yosef Tzvi Rimon, Re: Joined Collaboration, dated February 26"...When is that-how long ago?

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

Two and a half years, almost.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Two and a half years. "Collaboration with ITL headed by MK Yishai, we are aware and are deeply grateful for your work through JobKatif, the organization you established. You asked about our correlation, we had a good relationship. The various successes in finding employment for hundreds of evacuees, through retraining and placement, and assisting businesses, etc, are appreciated." Then he goes on to write that over 1,000 evacuees have not yet found employment. "Due to the successful collaboration with ITL, we are seriously considering a formalization of our collaboration and creating a joined initiative, funded equally by your organization and the government."

Here he says that each shekel that we give the government will match. I hope the collaboration is successful. At this point we cannot guarantee success, since this depends on government decrees. You probably hear my hint again at bureaucracy, which is out of our control, and we thought the initiative would become a reality 2 years ago. I was on my way to America to speak to donors. I told them, we need half of the amount. They respond: Wait, why shouldn't the government give them everything? I said, look, to this day, they gave nothing, if they give us half, that's a lot better. Some donors agreed, I was able to come up with half the amount.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Half of what amount?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

They give 18 and we give 18, so 36 million.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

And the 18 has not yet been used.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

These are funds which were not used, as far as I know. I don't really know where money goes, but I know the amount should not have been used.

Prof. Yedidya Stern:

You wrote 20 in your testimony.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

At the time it was 20

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

Shekels, correct?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Shekels. It was originally 20, then it went down to 18, and we gave in our amount a few months ago, we are waiting for the Cabinet decision, and if it happens and they deliver 18 million as well, I will show you what we intend to do with the money.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

That is also a big question, but before we go there, is it obvious that you are utilizing 36 million shekels?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Firstly, the answer is yes. I should say the government just issued a tender...

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

A tender for who? But...

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

But there is no one to run the tender, because one of the criteria is people who have found jobs for Gush Katif evacuees, and at the end of the day, there is really no one else out there.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

One of the criteria is that your last name has to begin with R.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

That's not written explicitly, but in reality, there is no one...

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

No one else competing?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

There is no one else willing to give 18 million shekels. That's the main thing. The tender will include anyone in that category.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

Yes, so why a tender, do you know?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I don't know why a tender is being used. If someone else is willing to give 18 million shekels, I am willing to leave. I have a lot of books to write, I would be glad to go if someone else can take this upon themselves. I don't know why. They might have all kinds of reasons that relate to the way they work.

Attorney Limor Peled:

I think this is a legal tender, not a tender to pick JobKatif over another organization, or have another organization apply...

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Rather...?

Attorney Limor Peled:

As I explained in one of the previous sessions, you hand in a request to the committee which annuls the need for a tender and they state that in this specific case you ask for an exemption from a tender so you don't have to do one.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

In your opinion...

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I think that is the reason.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

In your opinion, do you need this formality of exemption from a tender before sending out a formal letter?

Attorney Limor Peled:

I do not.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

This letter is from 2007.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

This letter...

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

The letter is an exemption from a tender.

Attorney Limor Peled:

I was only asked about...

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

No, no, no, I don't understand...

Attorney Limor Peled:

I have all kinds of...

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Say they undertook this procedure. When did this process take place, of an exemption from a tender?

Attorney Limor Peled:

This is what I was saying, there was a meeting.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

When?

Attorney Limor Peled:

I don't remember, it was a long time ago, don't you remember?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I think you're right, let me just rephrase, now I remember what she's talking about.

Attorney Limor Peled:

It's not a tender, there was no tender.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Now I remember what the state said. At first they said: If you create an organization, and you want to government to channel money toward the cause, you need to have a tender.

If we have a joined initiative, and the other side contributes money as well, then you are exempt from a tender. Several months ago, when this came out, they decided that even if they do have a tender, and we apply, I think we had to apply ourselves.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

What matters is the amount of time that went by.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

No, it's only three weeks, that's not the point. The Cabinet decision took two years.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

Why?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

That is the question. The question is not about the current situation, it's about the Cabinet decision; why did that take two years?

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

Two years from the letter to the government decision?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Yes. I can tell you that prior to the government decision, long before, there was a proposal sitting on MK Eli Yishai's desk. What took so long? I have several ideas, but

they are not objective testimony, and I am afraid they are slanderous, so I will avoid saying. There are all sorts of reasons. The reality is that it didn't happen. The best reason I can give is bureaucracy.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Who is signed on this letter?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Gabi Maimon, Director of ITL.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

Director of ITL.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Director of ITL, copied to Eli Yishai.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

OK.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

In any event, I think you're correct, even if there were a tender, now there are only three weeks to resolve the matter. This is not the issue. The problem is not the tender.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

It's the two years that have passed.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

It's the two years prior to the tender, not the tender itself. Once the government passed the law, it still took time, this is unrelated to the tender which took all of three weeks for the purpose of exemption, but this is not the point. This is a shame, because in the meantime people are falling into despair, as I said.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

And you gave them a hesitant 'yes' on the implementation of the funds.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I will implement the funds.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

You will implement them?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I will implement them.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

I don't understand.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

The staff.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

So what are you going to do with 36 million shekels?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Let's talk about that.

I have here a plan for the next 5-6 years. Why 5 years, I can explain now or later, whatever you want. I can explain why we need 5 years.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Come, tell us the plan.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I will tell you the plan and then explain the...

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Timetable.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Timetable.

The basic plan of action works on several levels. One is starting the businesses, now we are talking about 180 more businesses. In order to open the businesses you need to employ professionals. This relates to the question you asked earlier, we need them for advice before and support throughout the process. This is business planning, projections and support, which is central as I described earlier. We also need support for starting the business. The government decision was \$20,000. This was to get the business off the ground.

For businesses we need 14,400,000, putting aside the green right now, I'll deal with that soon.

Prof. Yedidya Stern:

That's 20x180.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Yes.

Prof. Yedidya Stern:

In shekels.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Employment. Professionals. Placement and writing CVs. Coaching or employment therapy. The website and upkeep which I discussed earlier. Training courses,

maintenance fees, scholarships etc. This is the yellow budget for courses and anything related to courses. Soon I will speak about the green.

The third issue is creative solutions. Here I spoke about some of the issues, giving a temporary stipend to allow time for adjustment...The example I gave was that we pay an supplementary amount in the first year and similar types of solutions. I have to say, each day we are coming up with new solutions, we are constantly thinking, sleeping at night with Gush Katif and waking up in the morning, otherwise there is no point. This is the 7 million, we are hiring professionals to do this thinking. Some are only for this purpose, but others can fill several roles, and so that's why I put them in the same category. That is 6,720,000 shekels.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

Yes, that's clear.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

This is the way I like to work with *halacha*, see? I hope this is ok, this is my style, organizing things. If you look here, this is the full amount, 32 million. The breakdown here is not so important, then there is a breakdown of the program and the businesses. Here this becomes more detailed.

Prof. Yedidya Stern:

Can we see six?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Six is the professionals who are included in the plan here, we are talking about a smaller amount, though we think there should be more, but as I said earlier we are 15 employees who we've always had. This all depends on our abilities. But professionals is placement, business, employment psychologists, coaching... this is their salary. The website, jobs, data, business information, a secretary, that's how we arrive at this amount.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

OK.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I have to say, there is another page describing our activity, as I said earlier, but this is only a general description. I have to say a few things about...

Prof. Yedidya Stern:

Rabbi Rimon, so you have a financial slide which describes your activity from the beginning until June 2009? How much did that cost?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I do, you want to know the costs up until today?

Prof. Yedidya Stern:

Yes.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I'll tell you exactly, but I don't have a slide. Until today we spent 15 million shekels. As time goes by, costs go up. I have to say all of the things I say here, the facts and employees and who is working...no one in the country has these facts. We are working hard just to gather the information. When I started this job I requested data, and no one had any data for me. No one knew who was working and who was unemployed. After a period of time we started making lists, which we have here, thousands of people with all the details. In addition we have a short version of the report about every person from Gush Katif,

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

That we saw.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

You saw, working, not working, precise information, not statistics. The information is accurate, and I must...

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

In other words, if we stay on the macro for a moment, what you are saying is that until today you have spend 15 million shekels and the government spent around 20.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Here, this is for you.

Prof. Yedidya Stern:

Thank you.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

25 million.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

The government gave 20 +?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

True. True. I must say all of this data... This is just a small story to demonstrate: there is a woman who was injured two months before the Disengagement, and she is suing the insurance company. She received a letter from the company and passed it on to us. They say she is demanding compensation for disability which prevents her from working, but they say- you don't deserve the money because you are from Gush Katif, and 90% of the people from Gush Katif are not working so why should we pay you? Even if you were not in an accident you would not be working. It's unbelievable, I have the letter right here, she is willing to disclose her personal information, not that it makes a difference.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

This is a private insurance carrier.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Yes, this is an insurance company, I have all the details here.

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

Never mind, but not Bituach Leumi.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

No, no. It's just unbelievable to see where the Gush Katif people stand, between a rock and a hard place, truth be told. I am not making up stories. I'm just trying to show you the facts, these are facts, not statistics, these are real numbers, though there are always the 5% you have a hard time following up on.

Prof. Yedidya Stern:

What is your degree of certainty regarding your ability to succeed at the matching?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Matching? The money?

Prof. Yedidya Stern:

Getting the 18 million.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I was a lot more certain two years ago, because I had a commitment then. The more time that goes by, the more difficult things are in the States, much more difficult. When I speak to the donors, they don't believe me, because two years ago I told them any moment. What can I do? I was not pulling their leg, but it's difficult to explain. I still believe, based on my experience so far, that if the government gives the amount it promised over the course of five years, I can come up with the money. I believe and I can tell you that there are donors out there, and hard as it may be, if they don't come through, I have the community in Alon Shevut and the yeshiva and the family. I will drop everything and go lecture, they are always asking me to. I will go and get the other half. I believe if they know the government's half depends on me coming up with the money, people will help. So I do believe I could succeed, with god's help.

[Details about the Legacy partnership have been removed for confidentiality purposes.]

Dr. Shimon Ravid:

A 5 year program?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Excellent, let me describe the five years.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Why five years?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Let me relate to that question. Firstly, as the years go by, the situation becomes graver.

People are home after four years of being unemployed, the situation becomes more difficult and serious measures have to be taken to get them out, very serious.

Secondly, time does not stand still. People over 45 have a difficult time finding work, and people are getting to that age.

Thirdly, we are starting to build permanent houses. Only beginning. This will take years to complete. Many of the businesses we are planning need permanent buildings. In addition, there are many people who need placement, but no one wants them. By building businesses, we can get them jobs as well. For this we need new businesses and permanent housing. This is more or less the story.

I must say this whole thing, stage after stage... You know that my mother is in England now. She goes for a week every year to be with her relatives... Last year she returned from England and told me my aunt Rini is working so hard. I said: "Rini? Working? I remember her always being so old! I think she's almost 100. How is it that she's working?" She said, she's doing great, she's working. I asked her what she does. She said, "She works at a call center, doing telemarketing." I spoke with her. I said to myself, if Aunt Rini can work, why can't people from Gush Katif be equally successful?

I found out that in some fields, older means more successful. They have more patience, and they don't get rid of you as fast, until you say yes.

I spoke with Makor Rishon because we have a relationship with them. We opened a Call Center in Nitzan. They employ twenty people, and now there is an option for another twenty. These are people who were sitting at home up until now, with their lives in ruins. It's unbelievable. When I go there people hug me. They say: "Rabbi Rimon, you saved us". They are on their feet, they get a salary; not a great one, but they are working. This is one example, but we are constantly thinking, coming up with creative solutions, we don't want to say we found someone a job and then wash our hands of them. We want to follow up, which people need when they are in this emotional state. It takes five years to get people on their feet. I want to say another thing about the money, even though you did not ask. I think the amount of money we are asking for compared with the problems we face is unsubstantial, on the one hand, and it is all going back to benefit the country. I'll explain what I mean.

I described the size of the problem, opening businesses, and the financial aspect, but the alternative costs more money. An unemployed person costs the country 2,000NIS minimally each month, around 24,000NIS a year with Bituach Leumi and social workers, etc, so around 48,000NIS for two years, a quarter of a million for ten years. This is nowhere near what we are asking for to get people on their feet. It's a year or two worth of Bituach Leumi money for a person who won't need it.

The businesses make these people into productive members of society instead of being a burden on society. In the long run, this makes money for the country...in the long run. The government only gives half of the funding, and we come up with the other half. I'm not sure that this is right, but I'm not trying to be right now, I just want to help the people of Gush Katif. That's all I care about. If this is the only way I can do that, let's go with it.

I just got a phone call about a kid who broke a wall in a school...broke straight through the wall. He's from a wealthy family. It was not just plaster, it was some special acoustic wall. He figured that his father's rich, so whatever damage he does, his father would pay for. But he didn't realize the price, and his father is not as rich as he thought. The country is responsible for these people being unemployed. They promised to get them back on their feet, and this has to get done, whatever the cost. This is their responsibility regardless of the fact that it is actually in the financial interest of the government to do this. But regardless it is their responsibility. You have a question?

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Yes. At the time, there was a government decision directing government offices and companies to give preference to Gush Katif evacuees, but nothing came of that.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Nothing came of that.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Have you looked into that?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I did. I was hoped to utilize this program, but nothing came of it. Every time I called a particular contact or my man Zigadon, each time he would say, Rabbi Rimon, you are so right, you are so right, but I don't know what to do. The jobs that came in can be counted on one hand. Nothing came of it, and we know if there are no jobs, if there is no law enforcing this, and no strong hand, then government jobs won't help. In reality this failed unfortunately. No one argues with this fact.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Is there any hope for this issue, or did you give up?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Look, I think there could be hope, but we need someone authoritative to implement these decisions. This was a Cabinet decision! If *this* was not implemented, what's going to help? Maybe the Prime Minister himself going personally? I don't know. Someone more serious...It's a possibility, but a distant one.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

It is a question of implementing a specific clause. If it had been implemented, then...

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

True in reality, but...

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

It forces the company to make decisions which are not necessarily in their best interest.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

So they didn't send jobs, and none were submitted for people with good qualifications.

It's hard to argue sometimes if they say that someone is not suitable. You can't always argue, it's difficult to challenge. We have to think about it again.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

What about the Civil Service Commission?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

Regarding?

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Preferential treatment of evacuees.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

We got no serious offers.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

You explored this?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

We explored several options.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

With the Commission?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

We did not contact them directly. We did everything through Zigadon at the time. We didn't do anything directly. We went to private people and industrialists, privately, but not to government offices. We went to people we had contact with. For the past six months we have been alone, but at the time we had contact with them. I do want to add two more things since our time is almost up.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Please.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

One, despite the fact that much of what we spoke about was negative, I think our goal should be looking at the potential to fix things. Rabbi Marital calls people who only look at the negative, "the son of Mewari". He always speaks bitterly instead of looking toward fixing things. You have to see the problems and be aware of them. But at JobKatif, we

focus on the good and looking for solutions, because when you see the problems you look at the difficulty, but you should be looking at what you can do to fix things.

Secondly, when people ask me: Rabbi Rimon, you have your community, your yeshiva, your books, how do you find the time to volunteer for JobKatif? I tell them, other than the fact that the Rambam writes that the greatest mitzvah is getting people on their feet, I really think anyone who looks at the situation and sees the amazing people we are getting back out there, who were so productive and today are in despair, no matter who you are or your political views, everyone has to get together and help. There is no choice but to unite and feel that no one can sit comfortably until these people are taken care of.

Do not make the mistake of thinking our success was due to my knowledge or experience. We had some successes, but this is not me. It's our staff, and the feeling is when you deal with chessed (loving kindness), G-d helps. We do so many things where we feel we have given 5%, but when a person gives wholeheartedly, God assists with the rest. If you have a minute I'd like to end with a story about this.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Yes.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I get a phone call from a Gush Katif evacuee, who tells me he got engaged. I said: Mazal tov! He told me, "I am unemployed, my father is unemployed, my mother is unemployed, I have no money for a wedding." I said, look, we at JobKatif help people

with jobs, perhaps find a charity organization. He said, Rabbi Rimon, I have no one to turn to, you are the only organization helping Gush Katif people, there is no one else to turn to.

I said, look, there really is nothing I can do. It's 8 PM, I am busy writing responses to rabbis. By 10:00, I was thinking, we'll buy him a washing machine or an oven. I began to think who we can turn to. At ten the phone rings. Should I pick up? I am busy writing. I always pick up at the end. It's a fellow, Itzik. He says, you don't know me, I heard you help people from Gush Katif... I want to give 300 seats at a wedding hall to someone from Gush Katif. Do you have such a person? I said, What's the story? He said: Look, my son is getting married, I took a hall with 1000, but I hate the hall, so we moved the wedding somewhere else. They said you have to pay for 300. I want to give this to someone from Gush Katif, but there is no flexibility regarding the time and place.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

That is divine intervention...

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

I call the guy and say, do you want this time and place, and this hall? He said, let me call my fiancé?. He calls me back – it's arranged.

I got back to the donor, and he was so happy that he threw in a band too. They got married in Jerusalem. I am not Hassidic, but from the day I was born I have only once received a call offering me a free wedding hall. A few weeks ago this same fellow calls

me up and says his daughter is getting married and he wants to pay for another Gush Katif wedding. This time, they can choose the place, it just had to be on a specific date. Three weeks ago, he told a relative who said he has a son getting married in three weeks, and he also wanted to fund another wedding. I call my staff, and it turns out that there is a couple in bad shape... I don't want to divulge too much, but someone got hurt in a terror attack, and now they are getting married in two weeks. So Thank God, these are three weddings. We do what we can, but when a person sees a project of chessed, he should not be afraid. Just start and God will take care of the rest.

The Honorable Eliyahu Matza, Chairman:

Thank you for your efforts.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon:

And thank you.