

Coronavirus Miracle in Israel: 31 Brazilian Jews Find New Home in Holy Land

In a miraculous display of fortuitousness and resolve, 31 new Jewish immigrants (*olim*) from Brazil managed to find their way to Israel last weekend despite myriad restrictions required to contain the spread of COVID-19.

“The fact is that our work must continue,” said Yael Eckstein, president and CEO of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews. “Of course, we cannot risk the lives of anyone, and we will not, but in this case we were able to abide by every single guideline and still fulfill the dreams of these dear Brazilian Jews.”

The Fellowship announced two weeks ago a \$5 million fund to provide immediate and ongoing assistance to over 30,000 elderly Israelis, some of them Holocaust survivors, who are sheltering at home in order to protect themselves from the coronavirus.

The effort to bring the *olim* from Brazil to Israel involved booking no fewer than 10 different flights, most of which were canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic. The *olim* had all planned their move to Israel well before the outbreak, and remaining in Brazil was no longer possible for them. In cooperation with Israeli authorities, and before boarding their flights, every one of the *olim* signed an agreement to enter into quarantine upon their arrival.

The initiative to bring the *olim* to Israel was organized by The Fellowship in cooperation with The Jewish Agency. Originally, a flight had been arranged at the end of March to bring approximately 40 *olim* from Brazil to Israel. However, due to the pandemic, The Fellowship had to notify everyone

that flights would now need the approval of Israel's Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Immigration and Absorption in order to proceed.

Due to a tense situation in Brazil, 31 of the *olim* applied for an urgent request to move to Israel by any means possible. Before receiving authorization from the Israeli ministries, each had to present a location in Israel that would be available for them to immediately enter into quarantine for their first 14 days in Israel.

After the *olim*'s original flight from Rio de Janeiro had been canceled, The Fellowship had to scramble to find an alternative flight. Fortunately, El Al's last emergency flight was taking off from São Paulo, a city six hours from Rio. For security precautions and in light of apparent quarantines taking effect in major cities throughout Brazil, the *olim* were brought to São Paulo 24 hours before the flight was scheduled to depart.

Getting the *olim* to São Paulo proved difficult enough with domestic flight cancelations and road closures in Brazil. However, once they all finally arrived in São Paulo, El Al announced that their flight to Israel was canceled as well, less than 24 hours before the scheduled flight. The Fellowship was left with no flight for the *olim*.

Yet again, this time just a few hours before take-off, a new flight was found with Turkish Airlines. There were enough cancellations to allow all 31 to board. After a layover in Turkey, the *olim*'s challenging ordeal was finally over.

All 31 *olim* made it safely to Israel last Thursday.

"This was a miracle," said Mrs. Eckstein. "Clearly, the eyes of God Himself were fixed upon the well-being of these children of Israel. The Almighty was seeing to it that they would make their way to their home safely. We thank God for the prayers and support of our many Christian friends around

the world.

"We've been planning our immigration and have been thinking about it for about two years," said Ilana, who moved to Israel from Rio de Janeiro with her spouse Louis and their daughters Jana and Maya. "We came in November for a pilot trip and fell in love... It was a race against time, but I am grateful that we are here in this country. We eagerly await becoming acquainted with this wonderful place after the passing of the coronavirus pandemic."

Ilana and her family have settled in Raanana, where they temporarily remain in quarantine.

"A deadly virus has created a new, nearly insurmountable hurdle for helping families who have longed to make their way to Israel and begin their new chapter in life," Mrs. Eckstein said of this remarkable journey. "Prospective *olim* around the world find themselves in unpredictable situations as the daily routines of so many have come to a standstill. Due to the pandemic, nearly all flights to Israel have been temporarily suspended.

"So this rare flight from Brazil is certainly a reason to celebrate," she added. "Even so, uncertainty surrounds the future plans of our most recent *olim*, as they begin to look for employment and a new home while our economy is crippled. We hope you will join us in praying for the health and safety of these families, and for the quick recovery of all those impacted by the coronavirus."