The following information provides an overview of recent events in Israel and the response and future directions of The Jewish Federation in this regard.

**Key Facts**

Mateh Yehuda-Beit Shemesh is the partnership community of the Jewish community of Greater Washington and South Africa. We are proud of this fifteen year-old partnership and what we have accomplished together in building personal connections and learning from one another.

Recent events in our partnership region are illustrative of what is happening throughout Israeli society – specifically with regard to religious tolerance, equal rights, and being a civic society. These are complex issues that are challenging all of Israel society, not just Beit Shemesh.

Federation and Israel share fundamental values which are the foundation for activities in our partnership region. We promote and fund programs which advance tolerance, equal rights and a civic society. The actions of a small group of religious extremists in Beit Shemesh have been widely condemned throughout Israel. There have been strong responses against these acts and the extremists who perpetrate them - including from the mainstream Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox community.

These events have further solidified our relationship with the people in Mateh Yehuda-Beit Shemesh and provided an opportunity for Federation to catalyze discussions and action. We are currently soliciting proposals designed to create and strengthen collaborative programs between Haredi and other communities in our region.

We stand with the overwhelming majority of the citizens of the region and Israel who reject extremism of all kinds and promote conciliation and moderation. We remain deeply committed to the welfare of the population of the region community.

**Federation’s Partnership**

- For the last 15 years, The Jewish Federation of Greater Washington has engaged in the Partnership 2gether (P2G) project of the Jewish Agency for Israel. P2G partners over 500 Diaspora communities with regions in Israel, and has proved to be one of the most dynamic projects in creating a true Global table for the Jewish People.
- The Partnership with Mateh Yehuda-Beit Shemesh has taken the form of delegations, school twinning, and initiatives in women’s empowerment, ecological issues and coexistence. Our focus is on identity-building and being an incubator of social change in the region. Local government authorities have a non-voting seat around the table. Federation’s current philanthropic work within the city of Beit Shemesh targets the needs of the Ethiopian-Israeli community.
- Federation believes we have an important role to help empower the more tolerant voices in Beit Shemesh, especially within the Haredi community. We are joining join forces with the residents of the city who are actively working to promote tolerance. Our Federation will continue to take actions to be part of the solution by living the values of tolerance we hold.
National Actions Underway
Federation’s national body, JFNA, is also working to nurture a more diverse and inclusive society in Israel. Collective Federation funding via JFNA does not fund ultra-Orthodox yeshivas, but does promote greater diversity and inclusion though grants to the religious streams via the work of the Jewish Agency and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). These efforts include facilitating the integration of Israel’s ultra-Orthodox community into both the army and the work force.

Concerns about trends impacting the very fabric of Israel's civil society are under discussion with representatives from Israel's top political and business echelons. From these discussions, it seems a tipping point is near – where the magnitude of the challenges is forging a common agenda across the political spectrum, focused on reinforcing the values at the heart of the Jewish and democratic state of Israel.

Available Resources
- Why we are proud of Federation's involvement in the Partnership with Beit Shemesh from a JPost newspaper article is here.
- Articles by Federation staff discussing the developments in Beit Shemesh: Shaliach, Anton Goodman’s BlogPost is here and Erica Brown's weekly Jewish wisdom article is here.
- Jewish Federations of North America statement is here.

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