

## Public Letter to Prime Minister Netanyahu on Announcement of Plans to Deport Eritrean and Sudanese Asylum Seekers

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Dear Prime Minister Netanyahu,

As North American Jews and as friends of Israel, we are deeply concerned about your recent announcement of plans to deport tens of thousands of Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers from Israel.

We are concerned that while in most of the western world, refugee acceptance rates for Sudanese and Eritrean asylum seekers average as high as [56-84%](#), in Israel acceptance rates remain [below 1%](#).

We are disturbed by [reports](#) from [numerous sources](#) that have shown that asylum seekers who have thus far “self-deported” from Israel [have not found safety and protection](#) in the countries to which they self-deported, be they their countries of origin - Eritrea or Sudan - or the third-party countries of Uganda and Rwanda. We know that many such individuals are [no longer among the living](#).

We are concerned that if you move forward with these plans, the lives of thousands of individuals will be put in jeopardy, and the name of the Jewish State and the Jewish People will be irreparably stained.

As a people who were once refugees, and were once strangers in a strange land, we believe we have a special obligation toward refugees, whatever their religion or race. As a leading signatory to the International Convention on the Status of Refugees (1951), and moreover as a Jewish State founded by Jewish refugees, we believe Israel should be a model for the positive treatment of refugees.

We therefore call upon you to reconsider your plans to deport tens of thousands of Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers. We urge you to respect the rights of asylum seekers and refugees as enshrined in the International Refugee Convention and in Jewish law and values, and to allow those asylum seekers already residing in Israel to live in dignity until it is truly safe for them to return. We further commit ourselves and offer our hand in support in any way that we can help in coping with the challenges of the refugee crisis.

Please do not deport these individuals who have sought refuge among the Jewish People, but rather let us work together in addressing the burdens and challenges of our moral obligations.

*“You shall not hand over to their master a slave who has sought refuge with you from their master. They shall live with you in your midst, in the place which they shall choose in one of your towns where it is good for them; you shall not mistreat them.” (Deuteronomy 23:16-17)*

Sincerely,

*(In alphabetical order; affiliations listed for identification purposes only)*

- Jeremy Ben-Ami, President, J Street
- Kenneth Bob, President, Ameinu
- Susan Freudenheim, Executive Director, Jewish World Watch
- Eitan Goldstein, Mazkir Klali, Habonim Dror North America
- Rabbi Seth Goldstein, President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
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- Rabbi Art Green Rector, Rabbinical School of Hebrew College
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- Mark Hetfield, President and CEO, HIAS
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- Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner Director, Religious Action Center and Senior Vice President Union for Reform Judaism
- Jonathan Rosenblum, Executive Director, Jewish Labor Committee
- Reuben D. Rotman, President & Chief Executive Officer, Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies
- Rabbi Deborah Waxman, Ph.D., President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College/Jewish Reconstructionist Communities
- Paul Scham, President, Partners for Progressive Israel
- Rabbi Philip Scheim, President, Rabbinical Assembly
- Daniel Schild, Co-Chair, CHAI: Canadians Supporting Asylum Seekers in Israel
- Stephen Slater, Co-Founder and Co-Chair, Right Now: Advocates for Asylum Seekers in Israel
- Daniel Sokatch, CEO, New Israel Fund
- Rabbi Joshua Weinberg, President, ARZA
- Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz