

# **Rabbinic Letter to Leaders of the Reform Jewish Movement to Prevent the Eviction of the Sumarin Family in Silwan**

Elul 5780 / September 2020

To the Leaders of the Reform Movement:

“עורו עורו ישנים משנתכם, והקיצו נרדמים מתרדמתכם”  
"Arise, arise, sleepers from your sleep; awaken slumberers from your slumber."

With these words, the great scholar Maimonides describes the purpose of the shofar (Hilchot Teshuva 3:4). And it is in this same spirit that we reach out to you in the days ahead of Rosh HaShanah. In this time of *cheshbon nefesh* and reflection, the piercing sound of the shofar is a wake-up call to examine our words, our deeds, and our personal and communal complicity in wrongdoing and our capacity to do better.

We, Reform rabbis and community leaders, call on you, as leaders of the Reform movement, to take action to prevent the eviction of the Sumarin family, a Palestinian family who has been living in their home in Silwan for generations and has been facing eviction proceedings for thirty years, and ensure that a permanent and just solution is reached. The Reform movement chairs the board of Himanuta — the JNF subsidiary which “owns” the home and is pushing the eviction proceedings — and sits on the board of JNF-KKL Israel, so there is real, tangible action our movement can take. We ask that you publicly and privately demand the Jewish National Fund-Keren HaKayemet L’Yisrael stop its efforts to take the Sumarin family’s home and relinquish any legal rights it has to the home. This eviction runs contrary to the Reform movement’s most basic values of upholding compassion and fairness toward everyone, and we request that you join us in speaking out in support of the Sumarin family.

Despite the length and complexity of the case, the Sumarin family faces a basic injustice. The JNF-KKL — in coordination with the right-wing settler organization Elad — is using a twisted interpretation of the Absentee Property Law to force out the Sumarin family. Moreover, the attempt to evict the family is part of a broader strategy by the Israeli settler movement to push Palestinians out of East Jerusalem neighborhoods and make room for Israeli settlers. We must stand up against the unjust removal of a family from their home. During a time of global pandemic, when we are all asked to stay in our homes to keep safe and healthy, we must not throw a family out onto the streets. Our movement’s connection to JNF-KKL, and through this case to Elad, means that we have become party to a grave injustice.

The Talmud in Sanhedrin (109a-b) teaches that the fundamental wickedness of Sodom was its valuing of property ownership over care for human beings. We must ensure that the sins of Sodom do not come to bear in Jerusalem. We must actively and vigorously stand up

against the unconscionable eviction of the Sumarin family in particular and Palestinians from East Jerusalem more broadly.

As rabbis committed to our movement, we hope that the Reform movement will continue to stand for its values by fighting on behalf of the Sumarin family in public and in private and bring about a permanent solution through relinquishing claims to the house. The family has a hearing in the Israeli Supreme Court in April. In November, the Reform movement will lose its coalitional strength within the JNF-KKL. In the words of Rabbi Tarfon, “היום קצר והמלאכה מרובה”, the day is short and the work is great.” It is incumbent upon us to act now while we still can and halt these unjust proceedings, which have threatened the family for thirty years. The JNF could stop all of these proceedings today if it chose to do so. The Reform movement is centrally positioned to bring about a just outcome.

Sincerely,

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