

International Cleanup Day in Israel: Bedouin and Jewish Schoolchildren Clean the Negev Together

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Bedouin and Jewish schoolchildren set out together to clean up the communal forest near the Bedouin town of Rahat in the Negev.

Almost 200,000 people took part in the events of International Cleanup Day in Israel, which was initiated by KKL-JNF for the 11th successive year with the help of donations from [JNF USA](#) and [JNF Australia](#). Among the many participants was a special group of several hundred Bedouin and Jewish schoolchildren who set out together to clean up the communal forest adjacent to the Bedouin town of Rahat.



Photo: Natalie Kadosh

“This is how we take care of the future,” said **Drar Watad**, who teaches at a Rahat school. “The children learn about good neighborliness and realize that they have to look after the world together.”

Ten-year-old **Zeidan Al-Qarnawi**, from Rahat, also identified with the day’s vital messages: “It’s important to keep the environment clean,” he said. “When we and our Jewish neighbors clean up together, it’s a good feeling.” Together with pupils from the Al-Firdaus and Sheikh Khamis schools in Rahat, Jewish fourth graders from the Yuvlei HaNegev School in Givot Bar also took part in the cleanup campaign. Givot Bar was founded in 2004 with the support of Friends of [JNF USA](#) and [JNF Canada](#).

Ten-year-old **Asaf Eliezer** told us: “The world will be nicer if we clean it up. It’s good for the environment, and good for people, too, because they’ll have a clean place to live.”

His classmate **Yuli Goren** was excited to hear that she was going to take part in an international operation that involves millions of children all over the world. “It’s fun to be part of such a big project together with lots of other children. Each one lives in a different place and speaks a different language, and we each go out and clean up the area near our home.”



Givot Bar Students. Photo: Yoav Devir



Bedouin school students. By Natalie Kadosh

Their friend **Ofri Koren** was busy picking up garbage and stuffing it into a big green plastic bag. She paused for a moment, looked back towards the area that had already been cleaned by the children, held out a bag full of rubbish and said: “It makes me feel proud to know that thanks to us the forest is cleaner now.”

Teachers and schoolchildren were not the only ones who took part in the Cleanup Day activities. They were joined by a two groups of soldiers, one from the Nahal and the other from the IDF Bedouin Brigade, who together enlisted to help with this important task. The Bedouin soldiers’ involvement in day-to-day operational activities shows that these Israeli citizens are active in all areas of Israeli life. They were glad to see the Rahat children interacting with their Jewish neighbors and working side by side with them.

“It’s a good feeling to see the Bedouin and Jewish children making contact with one another,” said **Muhammad Mazarib**, a resident of the Zarzir area in Northern Israel who serves in the

Bedouin Brigade. "It gives us soldiers a break from routine and gives us an opportunity to volunteer to do something for the community."



Left: Ali Al Huzeil. Photo: Natalie Kadosh
Right: Bedouin Brigade soldiers. Photo: Yoav Devir

The Cleanup Day events in Rahat are just one small example of the range of undertakings that KKL-JNF is involved in for the benefit of all Israeli citizens, including the Bedouin. By way of example, KKL-JNF is engaged in projects in three principal Bedouin communities in the Negev: tourism and an [ecological farm in Hura](#), the construction of a promenade in Rahat and a variety of projects in Segev Shalom.

Rahat Municipality Education Director **Ali Al Huzeil** said at the ceremony held after the cleanup was over: "It is Man who damages Nature, and so we are responsible for taking care of it. The children taking part in Cleanup Day understand the value of cleanliness. The encounter between Rahat children and those from Givot Bar was an added bonus: cooperation for coexistence in a clean environment!"

Director of KKL-JNF's Southern Region **Ami Uliel** addressed the children directly, and told them: "We adults are not so easy to educate, but if you children keep the environment clean and pass this message on to your parents, then, thanks to you, our country, our forests and our [rivers will all be cleaner.](#)"

Speaking to the representatives of Rahat Municipality, Uliel promised: "Together with you we shall develop Rahat and care for the forests on the town's perimeter."

The ceremony was conducted by KKL-JNF's Northern Negev Director **Elisha Mizrahi**, who said that over 60,000 volunteers – schoolchildren, soldiers and families – were taking part in Cleanup Day throughout the Negev. "By means of this remarkable campaign we are sending a message to the future, so that the generations that come after us will be able to continue to enjoy our world," he said.



Awarding to KKL-JNF certificates to teachers. Photo: Natalie Kadosh

The Al-Firdaus School choir sang the song "I was Born to Peace" (Noladti LaShalom) in both Hebrew and Arabic, and the Yuvlei HaNegev children responded by singing "Go into Nature" (Lekh el HaTeva).

As the ceremony concluded, KKL-JNF representatives distributed certificates of appreciation to the school principals whose students had taken part in the day's activities. Before returning to school, the Bedouin youngsters visited activity stations organized by KKL-JNF instructors, and, through games, extended their knowledge of the Negev, the map of Israel and the history of the State.

In the meantime, in the background, tractors could be seen loading on to trucks the bags of rubbish collected by the children – proof that they these youngsters had not come along just to escape the classroom and have fun outdoors, but also to clean up the world and provide a better future for us all.

Accessibility

