

Yishai: 'Our Goal is a State Without Illegal Aliens'

Interior Minister Eli Yishai announced the formation of a special task force on illegal immigration to Israel; proposals in two months.

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Interior Minister Eli Yishai

Flash 90

Interior Minister Eli Yishai (Shas) on Tuesday ordered the creation of a special task force to solve Israel's illegal immigration problem.

In recent days, Yishai held a series of meetings with military commanders, police officials, and members of the judiciary.

"I set my agenda, my top priorities, for the coming year and I intend to do everything possible to solve the problem of illegal immigration to the State of Israel," Yishai said when he announced the task force's creation.

"Our goal," he stressed, "is a state without illegal aliens."

Yishai's task force, which will be headed by Prof. Arnon Sofer, is charged with formulating a pragmatic course of action to halt the rising tide of illegal immigration into Israel, and to repatriate those illegal aliens already in the Jewish state.

Due to the urgency of this issue, Yishai gave the task force a deadline of two months to present their recommendations - at which point the Interior Minister will present them in a special cabinet session.

Yishai's office explained, due to the complexity of the issue involved, the task force required a broad expertise and is necessarily comprised of military officials, police commanders, attorneys, and professors in various fields.

The task force includes:

1. Chairman: Prof. Arnon Sofer, a Professor of Geography and Environmental Science at Haifa University. He specializes in demographic issues.
2. Gen. Yom Tov Samia (Ret.), former GOC Southern Commander. During his military service he also commanded the Givati Brigade, Gaza Division, and was a division commander in Central Command.
3. Prof. John Shtessman of University Hospital "Hadassah," and a former director of Israel's National Insurance.
4. Judge Sarah Parish (Ret), a former Senior Deputy District Attorney with Israel's Justice Department, and a former Law School dean.
5. Cmdr. Bertie Ohayon (Ret), a former Operations Director with Israel's Immigration Service.
6. Justice of the Peace Arye Sharabi (Ret), a former magistrate in Tel Aviv. Currently a private attorney.

The formation of the task force comes as illegal immigration to Israel, long on the government's back burner, has boiled over into Israel's public consciousness.

Early last week, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu vowed to begin enforcing Israel's immigration laws saying the Sinai border fence would be completed "in a few months," after which illegal immigrants in Israel would be repatriated.

Netanyahu, who has referred to illegal immigration to Israel as a 'national catastrophe' and a 'demographic concern,' noted there were some 60,000 illegal aliens in Israel, primarily in south Tel Aviv. However, Tel Aviv municipal officials say the number is closer to 100,000.

It is widely accepted that Israel, a small nation with a population of 8 million - of whom are 75% are Jewish - cannot accept large numbers of illegal aliens while maintaining the Jewish character of the state.

Earlier this year, Israel offered an assistance basket to any illegal alien from Africa who identified themselves and agreed to return to their countries of origin by May 1.

Immigration officials were directed to begin arresting and detaining illegal aliens who remained past the deadline, but a holding facility promised by the government wherein to detain illegal aliens was never funded and has not been constructed.