



STATE OF ISRAEL



OFFICE OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER
AND OMBUDSMAN OF ISRAEL

THE OCTOBER 7TH TERROR ATTACK AND THE IRON SWORDS WAR

STATE COMPTROLLER REPORT

Evacuation of the Population and Provision of Temporary Accommodation

February
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Special
Report

Foreword

The State Comptroller report currently before the Knesset is an additional publication in the series of reports addressing the deadly terrorist attack on October 7 2023 and the Swords of Iron War, and includes audit findings pertaining to the actions undertaken by both central and local government entities concerning the evacuation of the population and provision of temporary accommodation.

Since its establishment, the State of Israel has faced security threats from hostile nations and terrorist organizations. These security threats, alongside natural disasters, necessitate the evacuation of populations from high-risk areas. As the magnitude of the terrorist attack orchestrated by the Hamas terrorist organization on October 7th began to emerge, it became evident that an urgent evacuation of the population under fire, to be executed by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), was imperative. Additionally, in light of the military clashes occurring along the northern border as well, the government resolved, during the initial month of hostilities, to proactively evacuate residents from communities situated near the southern and northern borders and to provide accommodation for them in hotels, thereby safeguarding these residents and preserving lives in the affected zones. Furthermore, due to concerns for personal safety, a segment of the population undertook self-evacuation. In total, approximately 210,000 residents were evacuated from the northern and southern communities within the first three months following October 7. Of this number, the government facilitated the evacuation of 130,000 residents during the initial month of the conflict, following resolutions adopted by the security establishment and the government, and these individuals were housed in nearly 700 hotels across the country. The aggregate financial outlay from the state treasury to support the accommodation of evacuees in hotels, from the onset

of hostilities until the end of July 2024, amounted to NIS 5.26 billion.

In light of the unprecedented scale of the evacuation and the temporary absorption of hundreds of thousands of residents across numerous local authorities nationwide, the Office of the State Comptroller undertook an audit of various aspects pertaining to this matter. This audit took into account the challenging conditions faced by the parties involved, the multitude of difficulties encountered, the significant burden of responsibility shouldered by both the evacuated and receiving local authorities, as well as the commendable dedication demonstrated by many public employees who worked assiduously for the benefit of the evacuees, some of whom were relocated from extremely perilous areas. Already in the initial month following the outbreak of the conflict, I conducted visits with teams from my office to communities situated along the conflict lines in the southern and northern regions of the country, as well as to the hotels that accommodated thousands of evacuated residents. This was undertaken to closely understand and address, in real time, aspects requiring immediate correction and intervention. In my correspondence to the Prime Minister dated November 13, 2023, which delineates key failures and deficiencies in the management of the civilian home front while also outlining the status at that time, I emphasized that the government's emergency preparedness should have been comprehensive, specific, practiced, and ready for implementation. However, it became apparent during the visits, and through initial data collected by my office at the beginning of the conflict, that the predominant factor relating to the majority of deficiencies and gaps is the lack of emergency preparedness, coupled with inadequate execution of necessary actions.

Subsequent to my field tours, several teams from the Office of the State Comptroller conducted a thorough audit of central governmental entities and the pertinent local authorities, the aim of which was to assess the manner in which government ministries and local authorities had prepared, prior to the onset of the conflict, for potential evacuation and absorption of civilians; the actual evacuation operation; the absorption of evacuated groups; and the quality of services and responses delivered to the evacuees, with particular emphasis on educational and welfare services.

When the government elects to evacuate an individual from their home due to the state's inability to guarantee the requisite physical security for their continued residence there, it bears the obligation to furnish the highest quality services possible at the location to which they are involuntarily relocated. This obligation extends equally to numerous other residents who have self-evacuated, having perceived a tangible threat to their lives and their safety in their places of residence.

The audit findings concerning the **central government's management of the evacuation and absorption of the displaced populations** reflect a disheartening narrative of systemic failures by the emergency bodies, the ERC (Evacuation, Relief, Casualties) Authority and NEMA (National Emergency Management Authority), in their preparedness for the integration of the population across various emergency scenarios; the provision of substandard services by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs to the most vulnerable segments of Israeli society, particularly at-risk children and youth as well as students with special needs; failure by the Minister of Interior and the Director General of the Ministry

to activate the ERC system to aid in the absorption of individuals displaced by conflict; and the government's failure to effectively regulate essential coordination among all relevant parties engaged in the management of the evacuation process.

The audit pertaining to the **local government's administration of the evacuation and absorption of the displaced populations** uncovered significant shortcomings in organizational efficacy and coordination among the various stakeholders involved. The national evacuation plans were inadequately aligned with prevailing needs, resulting in local authorities lacking the preparation necessary to facilitate the evacuation of residents and manage their integration into facilities beyond their immediate jurisdictions. The Ministry of Interior did not implement structured procedures, failing to appoint a coordinating entity among the authorities. Moreover, the receiving local authorities were ill-equipped for the absorption of evacuees, leading to an irregular evacuation process that adversely affected communication with those displaced and the provision of essential services. Fundamental necessities, such as food, hygiene supplies, and educational and welfare services, were not delivered in a systematic and professional manner, resulting in a subpar response. A lack of coordination mechanisms among the various parties, insufficient centralized information, and financial constraints facing local authorities resulted in chaos, uncertainty, and heightened vulnerability for evacuees, both in terms of the services rendered and in terms of the support afforded to them during these challenging times.

A fundamental condition for facilitating an appropriate governmental response to the approximately quarter of a million individuals who were evacuated from their homes

is the systematic collection of pertinent information about these individuals, as well as the concentration, management, and transmission of such information to the relevant entities within governmental ministries and local authorities, all facilitated through a computerized information system. The audit regarding the **management of information concerning the treatment of evacuees during the Swords of Iron War** revealed significant deficiencies in the governmental system's capacity to concentrate and manage information pertaining to evacuees. Barriers to the implementation of early preparedness in this context and the subsequent transition to identifying and executing an alternate response during the war resulted in substantial shortcomings within the governmental system during the initial month of the conflict, October 2023, thereby obstructing the collection and management of demographic details and needs pertinent to the majority of evacuees. Consequently, during the initial weeks of the war, governmental ministries and local authorities were lacking essential information required to perform their duties effectively. A chaotic environment was prevalent in the hotels, where each ministry dispatched representatives to inquire about the details and needs of those residing there, without adequate coordination, thereby imposing an additional burden on the evacuees.

Effective systemic management of the home front is contingent upon several factors: the designation of an entity responsible for overseeing the civilian front during both routine and emergency periods, which is agreed upon by the various entities involved in managing the home front and granted comprehensive authority and responsibility for organization, preparation, readiness, and execution during emergency events; the regulation of the responsibilities and authorities of the bodies engaged in

managing the home front, particularly with respect to the evacuation and accommodation of the population over an extended duration, including mechanisms for addressing the needs of evacuees who independently elected to self-evacuate; the establishment of a national government plan for emergencies, which encompasses the formulation of a budgetary mechanism to delineate funding sources and budgetary priorities for each governmental ministry responsible for managing the home front; and a clear delineation of the status of local authorities, as a cornerstone in the care of citizens during emergency situations.

The terrorist attack on October 7th clearly revealed the inadequacies in organizing and preparing for emergency situations, along with the significant costs associated with such failures. The absence of clearly delineated areas of responsibility and authority among the relevant agencies, coupled with the lack of an overarching authority to ensure coordinated fulfillment of responsibilities by all designated entities during a national crisis, resulted in chaos that adversely affected evacuees and those who voluntarily elected to self-evacuate.

A conflict emerged between the Ministry of Interior and the National Emergency Management Authority regarding the delineation of responsibilities for evacuees and their subsequent accommodation. This discord led to a managerial vacuum characterized by a severe deficiency in coordination. Consequently, it is imperative that the Prime Minister promptly delineate the responsibilities of these agencies, including all aspects related to the preparation for population evacuation and the development of national evacuation plans, as well as the management of the absorption system within local authorities as a proactive measure.

It is essential to underscore that during wartime, particularly amidst uncertainties concerning responsibilities and authority, where issues may potentially “fall between the cracks”, the principal state bodies must adopt a value-driven and expansive operational and organizational stance that embraces responsibility, characterized by close coordination among agencies, as opposed to a more restrictive methodology; this is a significant test of leadership.

The Swords of Iron War highlighted once again the critical role of local authorities in preparing the civil arena for emergency events and addressing the diverse needs of residents, even amidst the extensive evacuation of the populace. However, in their current format, local authorities remain reliant on the central government across multiple areas and lack the mechanisms necessary for effective and assured action in crisis situations. Simultaneously, the influx of evacuees compelled local authorities to confront the realities thrust upon them. As the audit indicated, the receiving local authorities recognized the urgency of the situation and engaged in the task of receiving evacuees with commitment and enthusiasm, each local authority acting in accordance with its respective capabilities and characteristics.

The matter of the home front constitutes a pivotal concern within the national security framework of the State of Israel. The grave and shocking terrorist attack on October 7, coupled with the ensuing prolonged conflict that resulted in significant casualties, requires the Israeli government to assume, without delay, its responsibilities by establishing regulations governing the evacuation and integration of the population during emergencies. Given the persistent threats to home front security, it is imperative to foster a shared

lexicon for preparedness during both routine circumstances and emergencies. Furthermore, there is a need to delineate the responsibilities and authorities of the entities engaged in the management of the home front, particularly regarding the evacuation and accommodation of the populace over extended periods, as well as addressing self-initiated evacuations. A comprehensive national government plan, inclusive of a budgetary mechanism capable of activation during emergencies, must also be instituted.

Additionally, albeit no less important, it is essential to acknowledge the significant contributions of volunteers and civil society organizations in the evacuation and absorption of displaced individuals. Volunteering and civic engagement serve as vital social resources for Israeli society, which continuously relies on the resilience and solidarity of its citizens. Following the onset of the Swords of Iron War, Israeli society exhibited remarkable social responsibility, particularly in the initial weeks following the outbreak of hostilities. Civil society organizations, including voluntary associations and spontaneous groupings of civilians, along with individuals, were among the first responders to the October 7 terrorist attack, continuing to address the evolving needs of various demographics through financial contributions and diverse forms of assistance directed towards victims and their families, members of security forces, evacuees, and the general populace of Israel.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the employees of the Office of the State Comptroller in the Social and Welfare Audit Division, the Local Government Audit Division, the Government Ministries and Government Institutions Audit Division, as well as the employees in the Headquarters Division, for their efforts in carrying out inspection and audit processes with the utmost thoroughness, professionalism

and integrity and in publishing clear, effective and relevant audit reports.

It is incumbent upon the relevant stakeholders to rectify the deficiencies highlighted in this report and to draw the necessary lessons, **with the aspiration that future evacuations of the population will be unnecessary, thereby fulfilling the prophetic words of the Prophet Micah: "And they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree" (Micah 4:4).**



Matanyahu Englman

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