

**NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY (NACOEJ)**

165 East 56th Street • New York, New York 10022 • (212)752-6340

A NONPROFIT  
ORGANIZATION**NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY**

NACOEJ is a grass-roots, largely volunteer organization which works both independently and, whenever possible, with other concerned agencies to respond quickly and effectively to the needs of Ethiopian Jews. We provide medical, educational and vocational assistance, assist farmers by funding purchases of seed and oxen, and feed the hungry in scattered Jewish villages. We deliver aid via missions to Jewish villages as well as through other channels.

**NACOEJ EFFORTS IN ETHIOPIA**

Estimates of the Jewish population remaining in Ethiopia range from 15,000 to 20,000 individuals. The population is centered in the Gondar region in the northwest of the country, not far from the Sudanese border through which thousands of Jews passed in 1984-85. Since then, the border has remained largely closed to them. Several important Jewish villages are clustered around Gondar City, the capital of Gondar Province, while many smaller villages are scattered throughout the province, in the Semien Mountains, and in outlying areas which are virtually inaccessible due to insurgency.

It is important to understand that Jewish villages are now populated almost entirely by women, children, the elderly and the infirm. Virtually all able-bodied men and many teenage boys and girls left the country during the 1984-85 famine, believing they would be able to return for their parents; instead, the rigors of the journey, the death-rate in the Sudanese refugee camps and the suddenness of rescue in Operation Moses, prevented them from leading their families across the border. These strong young people are now in Israel, while the weak and vulnerable struggle to survive in Ethiopia -- a situation causing agonizing emotional pain on both sides. In Ethiopia, where farming is a job for the strong, families headed by women must hire men to work their fields, losing approximately half the crop in payment for this labor. Thus, even in a "good" year, many Jewish families suffer hunger and deprivation.

### NACOEJ REACHES JEWS IN ETHIOPIA VIA SEVERAL ROUTES

**MISSIONS:** Each NACOEJ mission to the Jewish villages comes into direct contact with hundreds of villagers. We supply clothing, school supplies, religious items, and sewing and craft materials directly to Jewish villagers. Our volunteer doctors, nurses, dentists and other medical personnel examine and treat villagers who otherwise receive virtually no medical care, using medications carried in by the missions. We also provide medical supplies to local clinics and the one hospital more or less available to some Jewish villagers. Excess clothing and school supplies, if any, are donated to local orphanages, schools and literacy programs. On missions, funds are also provided for agricultural and other vocational requirements (many Jews are craftspeople who earn their living through metal work, weaving, pottery-making, etc.). Funds are also provided for the support of synagogues, for clinic and hospital visits by patients requiring follow-up care, for the support of especially needy families, and for emergency needs. Great care is taken to make sure that any non-Jewish population in the Jewish villages receives equal distribution of clothing, etc. All share without any question of affiliation.

**OTHER ROUTES:** Between 1500 and 2000 Jews in Ethiopia receive regular financial assistance from us, and our relief rolls grow constantly. On an as-needed basis, substantial amounts of money are sent into remote villages in war and famine zones we are not permitted to visit in person. Many individuals and families in transit are fully supported as long as their need exists.

### NACOEJ EFFORTS IN ISRAEL

In Israel, where NACOEJ has maintained a full-time Associate Director since 1984, we are involved in funding and/or administering a variety of projects through our Jerusalem office. These include:

**Adopt-A-Student:** This program supplies monthly stipends to Ethiopian students (many married, with children) to enable them to remain in colleges, universities and vocational training courses. At present, some 70 students receive funding via NACOEJ.

Approximately half of these have adoptive families or institutions in America, who provide monthly stipends and personal contact; the rest are supported from **NACOEJ** general funds. Many additional students are on a waiting list for assistance. No administrative costs are deducted from the stipends provided by American "adopters."

**Memorial Record:** To date, no record exists of the names of the Ethiopian Jews who died en route to Israel; no one even knows the precise number. Using Ethiopian students in the Adopt-A-Student Program as workers, **NACOEJ** is collecting these names while they are still obtainable. An Ethiopian Jew in Israel coordinates the project.

**Magen Zion:** Hundreds of young Ethiopians now serve in the Israeli armed forces after orientation in Magen Zion, a special unit designed as part of the Ethiopian acculturation and absorption process. **NACOEJ** is supplying this unit with video equipment for classroom use, as well as funds for the off-base rest homes used by "lone soldiers" (those without family in Israel) on leave, and on Shabbat.

**K'dumim:** A group home with job training for young Ethiopian women with no family in Israel receives support from **NACOEJ**.

**School Programs:** **NACOEJ** has supplied everything from nursery school equipment for an absorption center to simple Hebrew texts for a boarding school. We have provided sports equipment, met special needs, and given close attention to children without families. We have also helped fund summer school and after-school programs for Ethiopian youngsters.

**The Newlywed and Newly Housed:** NACOEJ provides small sums to help newlywed Ethiopian couples set up housekeeping, to assist elderly pensioners in furnishing their first permanent homes, and to provide graduates of home-repair courses with basic household tools when they move into their own homes.

**Cultural Preservation:** NACOEJ has financed the photocopying of the crucially important Ge'ez religious texts smuggled out of Ethiopia so that religious leaders can continue to learn and teach their ancient traditions. We have enabled Ethiopian weavers to build and use traditional looms in order to earn money and maintain their craft, and assisted promising young artists in the Ethiopian community to exhibit their work. It is our hope that we will establish the first Ethiopian synagogues in Israel in 1989.

Many additional NACOEJ programs assist Ethiopian Jews in Israel both in entering their new world and preserving their own traditions. And the NACOEJ representative in Israel has always served as an ombudsperson, assisting Ethiopians in their contacts with local and national authorities, and helping them deal both emotionally and practically with the acutely painful separation from their families in Ethiopia.

#### NACOEJ EFFORTS IN U.S.

NACOEJ headquarters are in New York City, where the American Jewish Committee provides us with offices free of charge. We have chapters or active members in many areas of the United States, including Southern California, New Jersey, St. Louis, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Chicago, Miami, Philadelphia, Albany and Phoenix.

**EDUCATION:** NACOEJ provides speakers and slide presentations to synagogues, Jewish organizations, campus groups, schools, camps, Community Relations Councils, Federations and other organizations all over the United States. There is no fee for this educational service.

Important programming on Ethiopian Jewry is conducted by **NACOEJ** members. A week-long program in St. Louis included dance, music, poetry, art, children's dance and storytelling workshops, films, slide shows, panel discussions and the opportunity to sample Ethiopian food. **NACOEJ** members who have been to Ethiopia or have worked with Ethiopian Jews in Israel are also available to provide insights and updates on the issue to supplement programming by other organizations.

A curriculum for teaching a unit on Ethiopian Jewry will be available in Fall 1989. The headquarters office in New York responds to hundreds of journalists, Jewish professionals and others seeking information and assistance in dealing with questions about Ethiopian Jews.

Our informative mailings reach approximately 1,000,000 Jewish households. Our newsletter, the Lifeline, reaches 45,000 of our member/supporters three times a year.

#### **EXHIBITS**

Exhibits of Ethiopian artifacts and photographs of our missions to Ethiopia have been mounted in many cities. Artifacts from extraordinary **NACOEJ** collections have been displayed in many museums, including the Jewish Museum in New York City, the Afro-American Museum in Philadelphia, the Fenster Museum in Tulsa, the Spertus Museum in Chicago, and the Museum of the Diaspora in Tel Aviv, Israel. Smaller exhibits have been shown in Y's, synagogues, Jewish Community Centers and elsewhere. In many instances, the exhibits are accompanied by a display of artifacts that can be purchased.

**POLITICAL ACTION:** NACOEJ also plays an important role in encouraging political and diplomatic action on behalf of Ethiopian Jews. A postcard campaign in 1989 circulated over 200,000 postcards, which reached Congressional offices via constituents all over the United States. The campaign, urging Senators and Representatives to join the Congressional Caucus on Ethiopian Jewry, and to ensure that the issue of family reunification for Ethiopian Jews is on the agenda in any talks between the United States and Ethiopia, was termed an "outstanding success" in achieving its aims. A follow-up campaign sent thousands of letters to President George Bush.

NACOEJ directors are in frequent contact with members of Congress, officials of the State Department and other American authorities, providing background material as well as information gained on our missions and through other sources.