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## Preface by Antje C. Naujoks

In the early morning of 7 October 2023, the Israeli border region with the Gaza Strip was attacked. Palestinian terrorists raided army and police bases and advanced on dozens of kibbutzim as well as several villages and towns. They murdered and abducted residents. Among the dead, hostages and injured are Jewish and Arab Israelis, but also foreigners. By midday alone, 4,500 rockets had been launched at Israel's civilians.

A few hours after the raid began, it was clear that the life that had been known there had changed dramatically: also in the Karlsruhe partnership region Sha'ar HaNegev. This meant that the publication, which had been planned for the late autumn of 2023, had to be suspended for the time being. A spring publication was being considered at the end of 2023. But no one could have imagined that the situation in Israel in general and in the Gaza border region, in particular, would still be uncertain, complex and dynamic in the summer of 2024, at the time these lines were being written.

Despite these circumstances, the twelfth volume of Contributions to the History of the Administrative District of Karlsruhe will be published in autumn/winter 2024. Additions to the original version of the book are intended to contribute to a better understanding of the current situation in Israel as well as to commemorate the first

anniversary of the largest post-Shoah pogrom against Jews. As District Administrator Dr Christoph Schnaudigel explained at a memorial service in mid-November 2023<sup>1</sup>, the Hamas massacre and the defensive battles cost the lives of seventy-eight people in the Karlsruhe partnership region alone.<sup>2</sup>

With a new publication date in sight, questions arose. Should the existing contributions be rewritten or amended in certain sections? How does the volume need to be updated to illustrate the changed Israeli reality?

Descriptions of events after 7 October 2023 were added to two chapters. Chapter 3.3 on the partnership with Sha'ar HaNegev now includes an additional contribution which can be highlighted here: it describes the events in connection with the students from the administrative district of Karlsruhe, who had arrived at their Israeli exchange partners just a few days before the Hamas attack. Chapter 4 was also amended, as the German-Israeli Friendship Society regularly organises a wide range of events to inform people about the situation in Israel. In addition it demonstrates solidarity with Israel and its citizens in cooperation with the city and administrative district of Karlsruhe.

Of course, the question also arose about how the welcome address from the Mayor of Sha'ar HaNegev, Ofir Libstein, should

be handled. After all, they are the words of a man who was murdered on 7 October 2023 while defending his kibbutz. As his welcome address reflects the reality of life in the kibbutz up to 7 October, it was left in the publication. However, chronological information and an obituary have been added in which Knesset member Alon Schuster looks back at the work and vision of his successor in the mayor's office.

Difficult questions arose with regard to the content of chapters 3.2 and 3.4, which are dedicated to the history and people of the Sha'ar HaNegev region and Kibbutz Mefalsim. Ultimately, these chapters have not been rewritten, but are presented to readers in their original form with the exception of a few content-relevant additions and linking references. Nevertheless, in order to illustrate the new Israeli reality and the

impact of the terrorist attack for Sha'ar HaNegev, its communities and its citizens, an additional contribution has been included in this volume.

The new and preceding article 'After 7 October: Israel's new reality' sheds light on several areas, but due to the immense scope of the events, can only provide insights into the most central aspects of the events of 7 October, their impact in general and in the Karlsruhe partnership region in particular. This article concludes by looking into the return of many residents to the south and illustrates that the situation on the ground is still very uncertain. Embedded in the overall national picture, it becomes clear why the State of Israel, and therefore its citizens, is facing unprecedented challenges in securing its existence in the eighth decade of its existence.

Be'er Sheva, Israel  
End of July 2024

## After 7 October: Israel's new reality

ANTJE C. NAUJOKS

The 7 October 2023 was a Shabbat, the biblically defined day of rest for the State of Israel. The Simchat Torah festival was also celebrated, the new beginning of the annual reading cycle of the Torah, the five books of Moses. As usual, several generations of families came together on the evening before for the Shabbat feast. Many stayed overnight with family or friends to spend the next day together.

### **Between missile fusillades and terrorist attacks**

At 6.29 a.m., rocket bombardment from the Gaza Strip hit the Israeli border region. Only a short time later, sirens and apps warned several hundred thousand Israelis in a catchment area of around eighty-five kilometres towards Tel Aviv and Jerusalem of massive rocket attacks.<sup>3</sup>

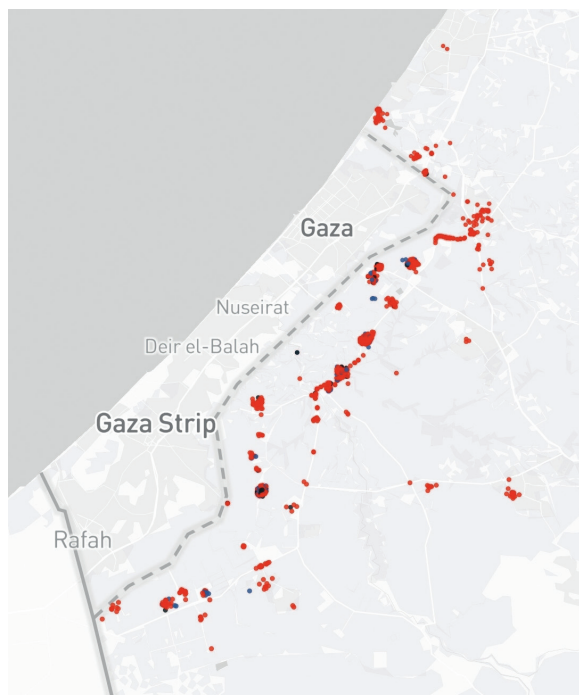
Under cover of continuous missile fusillades, Hamas commandos simultaneously broke through the border barrier at twenty-nine points<sup>4</sup>. Around 3,000 members of the elite commando of Hamas' military arm, known as Nukhba in Arabic, advanced into Israeli territory, joined by supporters of other Palestinian terrorist organisations operating in the Gaza Strip. The attackers came on foot, on mopeds and motorbikes, in cars and pick-ups and took to the air in motorised gliders and to the sea in inflatable boats. They had precise location descriptions, as the targets had been spied

out in advance.<sup>5</sup> Crucially, they carried large quantities of a wide range of combat and war materiel: knives, axes and hatchets, but above all, firearms and ammunition, and also hand grenades, anti-tank guided missiles, shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missiles, explosives and various high-tech weapons.

The terrorists simultaneously stormed eleven Israeli barracks or observation posts and advanced on dozens of rural communities. They also invaded Sderot, with its 35,000 inhabitants, in the heart of the Sha'ar HaNegev regional administration<sup>6</sup> and even reached Netivot and Ofakim, towns located fifteen and thirty kilometres further inland respectively. So many things took place within a few hours that even giving just a short description would fill entire volumes. A map published online in November 2023 under the title 'Mapping the Massacre' provides a more precise impression: <https://oct7map.com/>. It lists well over 1,400 points that represent those murdered, killed, missing or abducted on 7 October as well as key events. Information can be called up for each entry.

### **Abandoned and betrayed**

Heavy fighting took place everywhere. Israeli towns near the border have standby teams of combat-trained reservists to hold off attackers until the army arrives. That morning, they were vastly outnumbered by the terrorists, but still defended their



*A rough overview of the points of attack. The number of points increases when the map is enlarged, Source: 'Mapping the Massacre', <https://oct7map.com/>*

communities to the best of their ability. In addition to the army and police stationed on site, the army immediately mobilised a large number of forces, especially members of special commandos. In addition, countless men and women, in active or reserve service, flocked to the south from all regions of the country shortly after the attack began. Although they had no official marching orders, they wanted to make their contribution to the defence of their country and its people, and in some cases even sixty and seventy-year-olds made their way to the region. Nevertheless, and this must be emphasised, the Israeli civilians, who were the primary target of the Palestinian terrorists, were left to fend for themselves in countless places and often for many hours.

Kibbutz Nir Oz, located in the southern Gaza border region, became a symbol of this situation. The community of 427 inhabitants, 1.6 kilometres from the border, was stormed by at least 150 Hamas terrorists at

around 7.00 a.m. The residents were in their shelters because of the continuous rocket attacks. In just a few hours, thirty-eight people were murdered and seventy-two kidnapped in the Gaza Strip; a quarter of all members of this community. By July 2024, the number of deaths had risen to fifty-six. Forty of the hostages were returned to Israel, meaning that the community still fears for many abducted members. It is known that several hostages are no longer alive.<sup>7</sup>

Israel's army confirmed that at 10.30 a.m., three and a half hours after the terrorists invaded, soldiers first appeared at the kibbutz with an armoured vehicle, but misjudged the situation and withdrew. Troops were ordered there three more times without ever arriving. They were redirected after fighting along the way without the knowledge of the Southern Command. When soldiers finally arrived in Nir Oz at 2 p.m., not only the terrorists had returned to the Gaza Strip, but also the Palestinian civilians who had entered with or after them.<sup>8</sup>

Similar scenes were also reported in other places. It must be taken into account that not only a large number of terrorists attacked at the same time, but that the attacks were carried out in many different places. The flood of calls for help from the army, police and rescue services could not be dealt with, let alone adequately answered. Initial investigations, whether by journalists, academic forums or the Israeli army, also point to a large number of serious misconducts: consequences of questionable political decisions, misinterpretations of intelligence, gaps in emergency preparedness and wrong decisions during combat operations. Israel still has a lot that needs clarifying.<sup>9</sup>

However, there were, of course, also some successful defence scenarios. This includes, for example, the courageous deployment of the first tank crews consisting exclusively of female soldiers, who saved the lives of countless civilians in the southern section of the Gaza border.<sup>10</sup>

### **The ongoing horror**

The fighting on Israeli territory lasted longer than a day in some kibbutzim and villages. At the same time, not only the municipalities in the border region were repeatedly attacked with rockets, but also large areas of Israel.<sup>11</sup>

In Sderot, which recorded fifty murdered civilians and thirty casualties, Hamas terrorists occupied the police station until 8 October.<sup>12</sup>

The fighting was considered to have ended on 9 October, but even days later there was no guarantee that terrorists were no longer hiding in Sderot. The situation in Ofakim was similar. From its foundation in 1955 until October 2023, the city, which today has 29,000 inhabitants, recorded a total of forty-nine people killed in the line of duty or murdered in terrorist attacks. On 7 and 8 October 2023, fifty-two were added to this number, forty-five civilians and seven police officers.

In Kibbutz Be'eri, which has a population of around 1,100, thirteen members of the kibbutz standby team were present that morning. They were not able to access the armoury because the two members who had the keys were among the first to be murdered. The group was unable to reach their bodies. According to the Israeli authorities, the kibbutz was teeming with terrorists: 120 Nukhba fighters, seventy Hamas supporters and 150 fighters from the terrorist organisation Palestinian Islamic Jihad.<sup>13</sup> It was afternoon before the first kib-

butz members could be rescued. The fierce fighting in several places in Kibbutz Be'eri, which raised many agonising questions, continued until 9 October, but it was not until two days later that the army was able to declare the kibbutz recaptured. Here, 101 civilians and thirty-one members of the security forces lost their lives. In addition, thirty people were abducted, eleven of whom were still being held in the Gaza Strip in July 2024.

### **Continuous correction of figures**

In connection with the attack on 7 October, 695 civilians are reported murdered and 373 security forces killed in action. In addition, seventy-one foreigners were murdered. Around 5,400 injured people had to be treated in hospitals. These figures have had to be revised time and again, for example the number of people murdered at a music festival near Kibbutz Re'im. It was assumed that 260 people died, but 364 bodies were recovered. Added to this is the fact that not all of the bodies had been identified as late as the beginning of 2024. Even in late spring 2024, human remains were repeatedly being discovered in open areas or in charred houses. In the summer of 2024, Israel's forensic experts and specialists from the Israel Antiquities Authority<sup>14</sup> were still working to clarify fates.

Around 250 people – men, women, senior citizens, teenagers and children and even a baby – were abducted to the Gaza Strip. The majority are Israeli citizens, including members of the Arab minority. Foreign tourists and workers were also kidnapped. At the end of November 2023, 105 hostages were released as part of an exchange, including eighty-one Israelis, mainly minors and women of various ages, as well as twenty-three Thais and one man of Philippine nationality. Later, Israeli special forces were able to free two women

and five men. The Israel Defence Forces soldiers found over two dozen bodies of Israelis in the Gaza Strip: these were returned to Israel for burial.<sup>15</sup> Two Jewish and one Arab Israelis escaped from their captors after seventy days. They were mistaken for terrorists and shot by Israeli soldiers. In mid-July 2024, 116 people were still being held hostage, forty-four of whom have had to be declared dead.<sup>16</sup>

### Events in the Sha'ar HaNegev region.

Of the affected regions, Sha'ar HaNegev is the smallest with just under 10,000 inhabitants and twelve population centres, although it ranks in the middle in terms of area and border length with the Gaza Strip: around twenty-five kilometres.<sup>17</sup>

The 700 inhabitants of **Ibim**, which neighbours the town of Sderot, were spared acts of terror. Although Moshav **Yakhini** with its 700 inhabitants is located further inland, terrorists managed to get there. No member of the village riot squad had a weapon at the ready, but there were police officers and border police present who, together with some civilians, fought the terrorists. Seven Israelis were killed in Yakhini, five inhabitants of the village and two security forces.

Three kibbutzim in the region, **Bror Hayil**, **Dorot** and **Ruhama**, were spared due to their locations, although they were of course exposed to incessant rocket attacks and had to fear that terrorists could also invade them. The neighbouring kibbutzim **Erez** and **Or HaNer**, located to the north of Sderot, also remained unharmed by an attack, because the Erez kibbutz standby force was able to fight against the attackers as they approached. The team was later joined by members of the standby team and members of Kibbutz Or HaNer. Together they successfully defended their communities against advancing terrorists,

so that both kibbutzim were able to escape massacres. A captain of the reserve fell in Kibbutz Erez. Two other kibbutzim, **Gevim** and **Nir Am**, to the south and west of Sderot, also managed to fend off the terrorists. Although the head of the Kibbutz Gevim standby team, which was left to fend off the terrorists on its own, was seriously injured and one member fell, the kibbutz was able to defend itself. This also applies to Kibbutz Nir Am, which is only two kilometres away from the Gaza border. In the first few seconds, the female leader of the standby team made decisions that proved to be strategically correct and life-saving. As the fighting continued, soldiers jumped to the aid of this kibbutz. Kibbutz **Mefalsim**, to which a separate article is dedicated in this volume, is one of the kibbutzim located near the border that escaped a massacre. One of the daughters of Eliahu Segal, who played a decisive role in establishing contacts with the administrative district of Karlsruhe,<sup>18</sup> was holed up with her family in a shelter for over twelve hours on 7 October. They only occasionally had electricity, hardly any mobile phone reception and no Internet at all. But they sensed that something terrible was happening outside.

In an interview, Sharon Segal-Nir reported: *At some point we found out that our standby team was able to fend off dozens of terrorists. This was only thanks to a decision made by our kibbutz member who, as a civilian, fulfils the position of liaison officer to the army. Several months ago, when the army decided that the standby team's weapons had to be stored in the arms depot in future, and could no longer remain in private hands, he decided that there would be no such thing in his kibbutz. In other kibbutzim, members of the standby teams were shot before they could even get to their weapons. We all had our weapons at the ready. The fact that we are alive is thanks to this man and his unauthorised decision, as well as the many small miracles that occurred one after the other.*



*There was an unusually high number of young men visiting that weekend who were doing their military service, [meaning they had weapons and were able to help]. [...] The terrorists tried to blow up the gate, but instead of getting it to move, the explosion blocked the gate. When the Hamasniks tried to advance on foot, our standby team had positioned itself well and managed to eliminate them all.<sup>19</sup>*

Before it got dark, the family risked fleeing: Sharon Segal-Nir with her husband and two sons, her sister with her family and her mother Batsheva, Eliahu's widow. *At some point, my brother-in-law came running towards us with a large kitchen knife in his hand and shouted that we had to leave immediately [...] he had agreed a time slot of a few minutes with the standby team. [...] The boys were still asking what they should take with them. I remember shouting at them: 'Anything, nothing, we have to go.' Barely dressed in their tracksuits and pyjamas, we got into the car and left. None of us were prepared for what we saw on the main road. We were prepared for a few bodies of terrorists, but not for bodies upon bodies all around us, cars covered in bullet holes and burnt out vehicles. I wish I could have spared my sons from having to see this.<sup>20</sup>*

She is referring to Road 232, which runs parallel to the Gaza border for around fifty kilometres from the Sha'ar HaNegev junction via the kibbutzim Mefalsim, Kfar Aza and Nahal Oz, which belong to the regional administration of the same name. This road has been notorious for many accidents in Israel for years. Israeli aid supplies are delivered to the Gaza Strip via this road, many sections of which are not adequately constructed.<sup>21</sup> After 7 October, this road became etched in Israel's national memory as a highway with

*Road 232 from the Sha'ar HaNegev junction to shortly after Mefalsim. Enlarging the section shows even more names of the murdered and fallen. Source: 'Mapping the Massacre', <https://oct7map.com/>*

incessant shooting by Hamas terrorists, countless murdered civilians and fallen security personnel as well as thousands of demolished cars.

Like everywhere else near the Gaza border, this road is lined with prefabricated shelters placed by crane to provide shelter in the event of rocket attacks.<sup>22</sup> That morning they became deadly traps. These shelters cannot be closed, so people seeking safety from aerial attacks had hardly any chance of survival when terrorists fired on the entrances or threw hand grenades inside. These shelters continue to cause concern for all regional councils, including that of Sha'ar HaNegev, because they need to be replaced. However, the families of the people who died in such shelters want the old concrete structures to be preserved. Many of their loved ones left last messages there. This is just one of the countless tasks still facing local authorities.



Two of the ten kibbutzim in the Karlsruhe partnership region were the scene of massacres. Around 100 terrorists broke into kibbutz Nahal Oz, which has 470 members, and the nearby army base of the same name. Dozens of soldiers were killed and several were kidnapped.<sup>23</sup> Other army personnel were killed in the surrounding area while defending the base and the kibbutz, which lost thirteen members that day. Eight kibbutznikim were kidnapped. Five of them were released, the youngest was eight and the oldest eighty-four years old. An agricultural student from Tanzania had to be declared murdered while being held hostage. Two members of Nahal Oz were still among the hostages held in the Gaza Strip in the summer of 2024.

Of the 765 inhabitants of Kibbutz Kfar Aza, which is just under three kilometres from the Gaza border as the crow flies, sixty-one were murdered and twenty kidnapped on 7 October. Kfar Aza, like some other kibbutzim, became the scene of the most cruel acts of violence, torture, mutilations, amputations, violent sexual crimes, executions and the most brutal acts of murder, such as burning people alive. Here, as in other kibbutzim, entire families were wiped out.<sup>24</sup> Many events were documented on film, not only by Israeli security cameras, but often by the perpetrators, who also publicly shared the footage.

Kfar Aza became the symbol of an unprecedented destructive frenzy. The pictures of the devastated and burnt-out houses of this kibbutz, large parts of which will only be habitable again after being extensively reconstructed, went around the world. Almost immediately after the recapture of this kibbutz on October 10, the Israeli Foreign Ministry directed foreign reporters as well as politicians, diplomats and well-known personalities here in order to counter the around the world emerging doubts about the atrocities with the indescribably cruel

reality they witnessed during these visits first hand and unfiltered. Even weeks after the massacre, no one who was on site could ignore the smell of burnt flesh.

These two kibbutzim in the Karlsruhe partnership region continue to fear for their members who have been abducted: three from Nahal Oz and four from Kfar Aza. The fate of these two women and five men aged between twenty-six and sixty-four is a concern not only for their partners and families, including young children, but for the whole of Israel. Because no citizen of the state can bear the thought of what is being done to these people in captivity. Everyone also knows that it could just have easily been them; on the one hand, the risk of abduction lurks everywhere in the country and, on the other, many hundreds of thousands of Israelis live near borders that could be stormed at any time.

### **The Libstein family**

Kfar Aza became a symbol for Israelis in yet another respect: In the first few hours after the Hamas attack began, everyone in the country suspected that there was more going on than constant rocket attacks, but the overall picture was still unclear. But then, at around 10 a.m., fifty-year-old Ofir Libstein was mentioned by name in the news as the first person to die defending his kibbutz, Kfar Aza. It was suddenly clear that something terrible was, in fact, going on.

His wife, Vered Libstein, had barricaded herself in the shelter of her home with her three sons. Their oldest son Aviv, who had just completed his military service, located the missing father on his mobile phone near the house. Aviv had wanted to check to be sure and ventured out. While out there, he was able to collect the M16 rifle that his father had been able to retrieve from the kibbutz armoury before he was shot by the terrorists. He and his mother agreed to

**Incomplete without them!**

**The kidnapped **must** come first**







**Doron Steinbrecher Emily Tehila Damari Gali Berman Ziv Berman**





**Omri Miran Tsachi Idan Keith Samuel Siegel**

*Residents of Sha'ar HaNegev still held hostage in the Gaza Strip in July 2024. Source: Sha'ar HaNegev*

hide his father's death from the youngest members of the family, Idan aged fourteen and Uri aged nine. They also tried to stop them worrying about another brother, nineteen-year-old Nitzan.

It took thirty hours before the family was rescued from the shelter. When soldiers were later able to get to Nitzan's flat, there was no trace of him. Some time passed before Ofir Libstein's funeral was able to be held. He is buried in the middle of the country, far away from the region whose landscape he loved so much.<sup>25</sup> The day after the funeral, the family was shocked

by another announcement: Nitzan's body had been identified.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to mourning friends and companions who are like family to kibbutznikim, Vered Libstein mourns the loss of her mother, whose life was taken in Kfar Aza in the first few minutes of the attack. She also mourns the death of her nephew Netta Epstein, who, like her murdered son Nitzan, lived in the kibbutz's neighbourhood for the young adults. The terrorists hurled a hand grenade into his room. To save his girlfriend, who was staying with him, the twenty-two-year-old threw himself



*Better times: Vered Libstein with her fallen husband and murdered son. Source: Excerpt from a short documentary with Vered Libstein on the series 'Uvda', Channel 12*

on the hand grenade.<sup>27</sup> Irene Shavit said in November 2023: *Netta gave up his life so that I could live. So I have to keep on living, even if I don't yet know how.*<sup>28</sup>

### **Saved! And now?**

On 7 October and in the days that followed, Israel was in a state of emergency. Everyone was marked by shock and at the same time filled with a need to do something. Security, rescue and recovery teams flocked to the south. Medical staff worked feverishly, blood banks saw queues of donors and hospitals managed both the thousands of injured people and the flood of even more worried people looking for missing relatives. People from all corners of the country and every population group gave monetary and in-kind donations. But above all, they volunteered their time. Many supported existing organisations and associations, others founded their own initiatives.<sup>29</sup> This and much more took place while the rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip continued and, on top of that, the shelling of the north by Hezbollah<sup>30</sup> operating in Lebanon began

on 8 October. In this situation, an Israeli precedent had to be overcome: Never before had so many Israelis become refugees in their own country all at once.

It was only after lengthy debates about the criteria that the government decided to evacuate over thirty villages in the south with a total of 70,000 inhabitants, including eight Sha'ar HaNegev communities.<sup>31</sup> These people, babies, children, youth, adults, senior citizens, including those in need of care and people with special needs, they all had to be found places in other areas. Kibbutzim and hotels immediately opened their doors.<sup>32</sup> Wherever possible, attempts were made to accommodate communities together in one place.<sup>33</sup>

Those who survived the Hamas attack were left with nothing. Many had been woken from their sleep by the first rocket siren, so they weren't wearing much and were often barefoot. These people needed much more than accommodation, food, clothing and toiletries. Most of them had neither identity papers nor credit cards. They needed their medication, glasses, hearing aids and other aids. They had neither



a bag nor a suitcase and often didn't even have a smartphone. Children were missing their toys, toddlers needed pushchairs. The list of needs was endless.

These were mammoth tasks and the government, to put it mildly, did not excel in fulfilling them. It was the civilians who covered the most urgent tasks for weeks.<sup>34</sup>

And the challenges were never-ending. In relation to the evacuees alone: Organising health care far from home, arranging care for infants and children, and also senior citizens, including Shoah survivors,<sup>35</sup> setting up teaching and school lessons and, at the top of the list of priorities, social work and psychological care for these traumatised people, many of whom were in mourning for loved ones.<sup>36</sup>

Over the weeks, other issues became more important for those affected, such as permanent accommodation in a hotel. *The fact that you have to live so close together is manageable for families with small children who never let each other out of their sight anyway. But a married couple with two or three teenage or even adult children in one room is incredibly difficult for everyone. [...] There is no such thing as a family breakfast in the familiarity of your own four walls when everyone is eating in the same dining hall, nor is there the opportunity to heat up something home-cooked in between meals.*<sup>37</sup>

### The authorities

In general, it became apparent that the municipal and regional councils functioned far better than ministries and parliamentary committees, which are, however, needed to get laws and decrees rolling, for example with regard to support and compensation. The regional councils affected by the Hamas attack, in particular, demonstrated a tangible closeness to their citizens. The teams, the overwhelming majority of whose employees were themselves affected,

worked to the best of their ability in this emergency situation. The team from the Sha'ar HaNegev regional council took excellent care of the students and supervisors who were guests from the administrative district of Karlsruhe at the time, even in the most critical moments.<sup>38</sup>

The mayors and the regional council teams were available wherever needed to support the general and especially the crisis-related needs of their inhabitants. To this end, some mayors even chose unusual measures if they felt that this would emphasise their demands.<sup>39</sup> The regional councils dealt with many of the people's delicate situations. To give just one example: When government funding for hotel accommodation for evacuees dried up and hotels issued eviction notices, regional authorities advanced funds or launched fundraising campaigns to enable their residents to remain in temporary accommodation.

The regional councils of Israel's south are now cooperating in many matters with the so-called 'Tekuma Authority', which is responsible for rebuilding.<sup>40</sup> This authority was established by the government for five years and is responsible for the reconstruction of the south in a much greater sense than a mere physical reconstruction.

The whole country could see the mayors of the Gaza border communities in the media for months and on an almost daily basis. It did not go unnoticed that the charismatic Sha'ar HaNegev mayor was missing. Instead, Yossi Keren, Libstein's deputy, was involuntarily appointed to the position of mayor on 7 October.<sup>41</sup> Nationwide municipal elections, which were due to be held in Israel at the end of October 2023, had to be postponed. When they took place at the end of February 2024,<sup>42</sup> the Sha'ar HaNegev regional administration was among those municipalities in which elections could not yet be held due to the war situation. Here and in other regions in

the south and north, the election is to be held at the end of November 2024.

### Ongoing challenges

Israeli society, with every section of the population, whether long-established or immigrant, young or old, religious or secular, Jewish, Muslim, Druze, Christian or not belonging to any of these ethnic groups or religions, is feeling the impact of the drastic events in one way or another. For those directly affected it can be said: Their lives have changed massively and irrevocably. This affects the survivors of the pogrom, the additional evacuees from the south and also, albeit under different circumstances, the evacuated inhabitants of the north as well as soldiers and their families: those carrying out their military service, professional soldiers and around 360,000 reservists who were mobilised in October 2023.<sup>43</sup> It doesn't bear thinking about the heartbreaking stories and the challenges that have followed: Orphans are now growing up with grandparents or together with cousins in the families of

uncles and aunts. Minors were released from the hostage situation only to learn on their return that relatives and friends had been murdered. They also often had to be told that their father was being held in the Gaza Strip and that they no longer had a home in the sense of a place to live. Mothers have given birth to children whose father is still being held hostage or was murdered on 7 October or was killed in action. Fathers try to keep their families together, even though the mother has been murdered and the first child is due to do military service. Parents mourning a child murdered on 7 October have to bury another child who died as a soldier. There are couples with small children in which one parent works in the medical field and is therefore indispensable in the south, while the family has been evacuated to another part of the country. Many people are marked by lifelong disabilities as a result of what happened. People who had selflessly helped others are now in a position in which they cannot cope psychologically with the events and are unable to work as a result. Countless peo-



Equipment in the mayor of Sha'ar HaNegev's official car: helmet, bulletproof vest, rifle with ammunition, first aid kit and a pillow in case you have to sleep in the car. Source: Extract from a TV report by the Israeli broadcaster Can Channel 11