

Large *Asifah* Hears Call From *Gedolei Yisrael* to Secure Har Hazeisim

EDA KRAM

At a special *asifah* on Sunday at the Agudah of Avenue L, Agudas Yisroel Bais Binyomin, convened by the International Committee for the Preservation of Har Hazeisim (ICPHH), an overflow crowd of more than 600 people heard appeals from members of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah and other notables to secure the violence-plagued Har Hazeisim. Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel, executive vice president of Agudath Israel of America, opened the *asifah* by saying that "while many of us were skeptical five years ago when the effort first started that any changes could be made on the troubled Har Hazeisim, the Committee proved that through awareness and action, much could be done."

Mr. Menachem Lubinsky, co-chairman of the ICPHH, reminded the crowd of the Rambam's distinct *halachah* "of the *kedushah* of Har Hazeisim just like the *makom Hamikdash*." He said that the Committee had made enormous progress in broadening the scope of support to Canada and Europe and, for the first time in history, the upgrade of security on Har Hazeisim was included in the recent coalition agreement.

Harav Aharon Feldman, *shlita*, *Rosh Yeshivah* of Ner Israel Yeshivah in Baltimore and a member of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah, called the responsibility of "*kvod hameis* something we must all share." He too spoke of the *kedushah* of Har Hazeisim and the importance of respecting the luminaries who have been buried there over the ages.

Harav Shmuel Kamenetsky, *shlita*, *Rosh Yeshivah* of the Yeshiva Gedolah of Philadelphia and a member of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah, also spoke of the "desecration of a place that has such enormous *kedushah*." He added: "What a great *zechus* for the people who are involved in this endeavor!"

Harav Moshe Tuvia Lief, *Mara d'Asra* of Agudas Yisroel Bais Binyomin, reflected on the many members of his family who are buried there. "It is unfathomable that the Arabs should have destroyed more *matzeivos* (65,000) than the Nazis did in their six-

year march through Europe (14,000)." He thanked the Committee for alerting the world about the violence there and, slowly, bringing about change.

Mr. Malcolm Hoenlein, vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, called the efforts of the ICPHH "game changing and life changing." Mr. Hoenlein said that "securing Har Hazeisim must become a high priority of the new government." He reported that he had just returned from Israel and that he had raised the issue of Har Hazeisim with leading government officials. He added: "They (the Arabs) understand fully well that if they deny us our past, they deny us our future." Harav Kamenetsky warmly praised Mr. Hoenlein for his role in trying to secure Har Hazeisim.

In an emotional video presentation, the crowd saw images of the desecration on Har Hazeisim, including broken *matzeivos*, garbage, decaying dead donkeys, soccer matches and more. They heard from Mr. Yoel Harfenes, whose family came under attack while traveling on Har Hazeisim. But they also heard about some of the progress that has been made, including the construction of a camera surveillance monitoring station, the installation of 142 surveillance cameras, the establishment of a police substation, and repairs of the infrastructure.

The committee, according to Chairman Avrohom Lubinsky, is pushing for the construction of a high security wall, additional cameras on access roads, the deployment of more police, the construction of a Visitor's Center and shul and other projects to help project Har Hazeisim.

In addition to Harav Feldman and Harav Kamenetsky, other members of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah who were present included Harav Aharon Schechter, *shlita*, *Rosh Yeshivah* of Yeshiva and Mesivta Rabbi Chaim Berlin, and Harav Yosef Frankel, *shlita*, the Vyelipoler Rav. Rabbanim from several communities were also present at what was an extremely inspiring morning in support of Har Hazeisim.



L-R: Harav Aharon Feldman, Harav Aharon Schechter, and Harav Moshe Tuvia Lief at the *asifah* for Har Hazeisim.



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Harav Shmuel Kamenetsky addressing the *asifah* on behalf of Har Hazeisim.