

Talk given by Avi Dabush at AGM of British Friends of Rabbis for Human Rights  
on 9 December 2019

I am the new director of Rabbis for Human Rights. I was raised in Ashkelon and came from a right wing Mizrahi family, half from Syria and half from Libya.

There is a deep split and separation in Israel with this idea of progressive values being opposite to orthodox values. RHR is trying to influence Israeli society. We are asking you all to be our partners in this by supporting us and coming to see us in Israel.

Ben Azai and Akiba upheld the most fundamental idea that we are all created by God. This is in the Universal Human Rights Discourse. Tomorrow is the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These core values are in Israel's Declaration of Independence pronounced in the midst of a war. It states that Israel wants to make peace with its neighbouring countries. My family is from Syria and Libya and I want to be able to take my sons to Damascus and Tripoli. Jacob decides to be active to become Israel. That involves not just talking but making actions.

RHR works with people who live in poverty, Jews and Arabs. They come to our centre in Hadera for support and help, for example concerning issues of public housing. We are taking those issues into the public arena. We want to do this in Umm-El-Fahm as well as Hadera. The one way we are unique is we talk from the heart of Israel.

In our education programme we teach a lot of people who are becoming soldiers about human rights.

We aid the Bedouin. In our work in the West Bank there is a big problem of Jews and Arabs fighting over the same land. We work with Arab farmers and do intensive work helping with the olive harvest. There has been an increase in attacks by settlers on Arab farmers of over 50% in the past year.

It is their property and we are helping them pick their olives. We have had 600 volunteers helping this harvest, a remarkable level of assistance.

In October young settlers from Yitzhar, a village near Nablus, attacked farmers and our members. They broke the arm of Rabbi Moshe Yehudai, who was a Rabbi in Newcastle. He told the settlers he was 80 and too old to run away.

We will be planting trees to replace those burnt or destroyed at Tu b'shevat with the permission of the army, as a way to connect and setting an example of peace.

I spent 20 years in civil society in the Western Negev , promoting diplomatic solutions. In our area the right and left are not listening to each other. We are in a process of changing that using the right language and right discourse.

What do we want for our children/Israel to be? After 2,000 years of exile, we came to the Promised Land and have to face the challenge of people who have lived there for hundreds of years. We are gaining more Rabbis, both Progressive and Orthodox, in our membership.

Thank you for being part of it and we can develop this together.