

## African Refugee Passover Seder held in Tel Aviv

Various international and Israeli NGO's, under the direction of the ARDC, joined together to put on a Passover seder in honor of the African refugee community in Israel. The Seder drew an eye-opening parallel between the historical story of the exodus of Jews from Egypt, and the modern day exodus that is occurring from various countries in Africa.

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This past Friday, African refugees from the Congo, Nigeria, Darfur, and Eritrea came together with Jews at Levinsky Park to celebrate Passover, a landmark in Jewish history signifying the Israelites' freedom from slavery in Egypt. More than 400 people read from the specialized Haggadah, ate Matza, and sang songs in remembrance of the Israelites' miraculous escape from Egypt.

Although 70% of those who attended the Seder were non-Jewish African refugees, the ceremony was no less meaningful for them. Many could relate personally to the Passover story, having also made daring escapes from their home countries, often having to leave behind their family or friends, and make dangerous journeys to an unfamiliar world where their lives were constantly put in jeopardy. Just as the Jewish people gathered to celebrate freedom in the land of Israel, so too the Africans had a chance partake in this special experience and apply the blessings and joy of freedom to their own personal lives.

The Seder was hosted by the African Refugee Development Center, an Israeli NGO that works to assist Africa refugees and asylum seekers in Israel. Several IDC students work with the ARDC, and in fact an official internship program with the organization will be launched next year

for third year government students. Various other NGOs attended and helped run the Seder including *Amnesty International, Physicians for Human rights, Brit Olam, Fugee Fridays, Hashomer Hatzair, Israel Activists Kibbutz Movements,* and many more.



The invitation to the 'seder' with the refugees

During the Seder, representatives from not only the NGO's spoke, but also representatives from the various refugee communities. Hearing about the incredible and heartbreaking journey's that many of them had to go through on their exodus from persecution put a tangible face on the Passover story. On a more positive note, they expressed their happiness at the opportunity to live in Israel, and their gratitude for the numerous organizations working for their rights and inclusion. Along with the speeches there were also songs and dances put on by the various groups. Some of the performances were native and tribal, while others were more modern renditions.



Most importantly the event was a critical opportunity to help include the African refugees in an event that is so integral to the Jewish community and the state of Israel. As the situation in many African countries continues to deteriorate, it is imperative that nations not only help to improve things on the continent, but also to do their part to take in and include refugees. Cultural exchanges such as the Seder are a crucial first step towards incorporating the African refugees into our society, and increasing Israeli awareness of the difficult situation they are facing.

Part of the philosophy of the IDC is the necessity of giving back to the community and making Israel a better place. There is no question that the refugee Seder and the volunteer work done by so many IDC students with the African refugee community is playing a large part in achieving that goal of a better Israel.