**** To Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel

**“The stranger who lives among you will be like yourselves, and you will love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt”**

The State of Israel has embarked upon a campaign to expel tens of thousands of Sudanese and Eritrean asylum seekers living in the country, to Rwanda. According to research and the testimony of asylum seekers who arrived in Rwanda from Israel in recent years, Rwanda is an extremely dangerous destination for non-native asylum seekers. They have absolutely no status in the country and, upon arrival there, are forced to flee to other countries and embark on a second journey of searching for refuge. This generally involves great suffering, including being subjected to rape, robbery, torture, and human trafficking; it is a journey that many do not survive. The money that the State of Israel gives to those leaving as a “departure stipend” is usually stolen from them, according to published testimony.

Given this current, cruel policy, we, the undersigned rabbis, demand that the State of Israel act in accordance with the international treaty regarding the status of refugees, upon which it is signed, and which it took part in advancing and formulating. This treaty was created largely in response to the suffering and tragedies experienced by Jewish refugees during the period of the Holocaust. The Torah counsels us: “And you knew the soul of the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” We believe that it is appropriate for the Jewish People to show increased responsibility for alleviating the suffering of nationless individuals.

Additionally, we believe that it behooves the State of Israel to adopt the Jewish ethical principle that states: “You shall not hand over a slave who has fled to you from his master. He shall dwell among you, in the place that he chooses within one of your gates, where it is good for him – do not wrong him” (Deuteronomy 23:16-17).

We call upon the government of Israel to implement a process of examining requests for refuge from Sudanese and Eritrean asylum seekers in an efficient, fair, transparent, and unbiased manner, in accordance with international standards. At the same time, we are aware of the suffering of the residents of South Tel Aviv, and implore the authorities to provide an appropriate solution to the issues causing distress in the neighborhood. Being responsive to “the poor of your own city” should not in any way compromise our responsibility to the stranger among us. It is the duty of the State of Israel to find appropriate solutions for both the asylum seekers and the residents of South Tel Aviv, solutions that fulfill the ethical obligations of a Jewish state that aspires to be a light unto the nations.

Our human and Jewish responsibility towards “strangers” in our country is to absorb them fairly and compassionately. Expelling those who reside here to dangerous countries is a desecration of G-d’s name, and a desecration of the name and character of the Jewish state, the majority of whose residents are descendants of refugees from European and Arab countries.

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**Rabbi Galia Sadan**

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**Rabbi William Berk**

**Rabbi Dr. Meesh Hammer-Kossoy**

**Gideon Admanit – Beit Midrash for Rabbis**

**Leah Shakdiel – Beit Midrash for Rabbis**

**Naomi Efrat – Beit Midrash for Rabbis**

**Yael Vurgan – Beit Midrash for Rabbis**

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