



January 10, 2022

By Hand Delivery to Knesset Mailbox and email

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett – c/o talgz1@gmail.com

Deputy Prime Minister Benjamin Gantz - minister@mod.gov.il

Justice Minister Gideon Sa'ar – sar@justice.gov.il

Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked – sar@moin.gov.il

State of Israel

Jerusalem, Israel

Re: URGENT Request to stop Minhal Ezrahi's immoral and discriminatory planned destruction of terror victim Ezra Schwartz vineyard and Jewish families' livelihoods at Arugot Farms

Dear Prime Minister Bennett, Deputy Prime Minister Gantz and Justice Minister Sa'ar:

The Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) – the oldest pro-Israel organization in America – urges you to use your good offices to stop the Minhal Ezrahi (Israeli Civil administration)'s immoral and discriminatory planned destruction of the vineyard planted by Jewish-American terror victim Ezra Schwartz's family at Arugot Farms. The vineyard and Arugot Farms provide a livelihood for several Jewish families, including the family of Rabbi Jeremy Gimpel, who ran on PM Bennett's Jewish Home slate. We understand that years of work and hundreds of thousands of shekels were spent on the vineyard. ZOA members who have visited Arugot Farms have been extremely impressed with the love and dedication of the Jewish families and the volunteers from around the world who transformed into an oasis what was previously barren historic Jewish land. Arugot Farms is near where King David tended his sheep as a boy.

Destroying the Ezra Schwartz/Arugot Farms vineyard, especially in this Shmittah year, would cause irreparable harm and grief to the already-bereaved Schwartz family, the Jewish families of Arugot farm, and the entire Zionist cause. Destroying the vineyard would also traumatize and disillusion the IDF boys asked to carry out this immoral and discriminatory order, which violates Jewish law.

The planned destruction of the Ezra Schwartz/Arugot Farms vineyard violates the Halakha forbidding destroying fruit-bearing trees even when besieging a city (Deuteronomy/Devarim 20:19) and violates Jewish law prohibiting destroying another Jews' livelihood. The highest form of charity is to enable another to earn a livelihood. Destroying that livelihood is a grave sin.

Destroying the Arugot Farms vineyard would have terrible international repercussions that go way beyond the vineyard and its dedicated families and the Schwartz family.

While visiting Arugot Farms, ZOA members met Germans who were volunteering at the farm as their way of trying to atone for the horrors that the Nazi regime wreaked on the Jewish people during World War 2. We shudder at the sort of message that it would send if the work of these caring Germans seeking to atone for the Holocaust were destroyed by the Israeli government.

As you are aware, antisemitism is increasing around the world, prompting renewed interest in Aliyah. But when the Israeli Civil Administration discriminates against Jews – by preparing to tear up the beloved Ezra Schwartz/Arugot Farms vineyard or other Jewish farms, while allowing 72,000 illegal Arab structures and farms to stand in Area C even though Area C is legally under Israeli control – Jews considering Aliyah sadly conclude that Israel is unfortunately also not a haven from anti-Jewish discrimination and destruction.

Planting vineyards, returning the land to its historic Jewish qualities, is a quintessential Zionist endeavor. Indeed, HaNadiv Edmond James de Rothschild assisted the Jews of the First Aliyah in the 1880s plant vineyards near Rishon Letziyon, Zichron Ya'akov and elsewhere in Eretz Yisrael.

Please use your good offices to stop the Minhal Ezrahi from destroying the Ezra Schwartz/Arugot Farms vineyard.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Morton A. Klein
ZOA National President

David Schoen, Esq.
ZOA National Chairman

Elizabeth Berney, Esq.
ZOA National Director of Research & Special Projects (and visitor to Arugot Farms)

Kevin Ross
ZOA Philadelphia Co-President (and visitor to Arugot Farms)

Zionist Organization of America (ZOA)
633 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10017
Tel: (212) 481-1500