

NIF Denies 'Formal' Involvement in Ethiopian Jews' Rioting

Ultra-leftist fund calls on demonstrators 'to avoid any repetition of last night's events which resulted in many injuries.'

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Police arrest Ethiopian Jewish protester at Tel Aviv demo

Ben Kelmer/Flash 90

The New Israel Fund, which is associated with the radical left wing and has been deeply involved in stirring up conflict between different sections of Israel's population over the years, denied on Monday [any formal involvement](#) in Sunday's rioting by Ethiopian-Jewish Israelis

In a statement, the NIF said that it “supports the struggle of the Ethiopian community to eliminate the racism and institutionalized discrimination that threatens them in Israel, including systematic mistreatment and profiling by the police. The Israeli government and ordinary Israelis must fulfill their obligation to treat the Ethiopian community as full and valued citizens. We must hear their cries for equality and justice,” it said.

The fund added, however: “We resolutely oppose violence and call on both the small number of demonstrators who resorted to violence, and on the police themselves, to avoid any repetition of last night’s events which resulted in many injuries. We will continue to support this community’s and every Israeli’s right to peaceful protest.”

“Finally, we are aware that the usual ultra-nationalist media outlets and politicians are associating this protest with the New Israel Fund,” the fund stated. “While we morally support the community’s struggle and are proud of our longstanding investment in Israel’s most marginalized communities, we had no formal involvement in the recent demonstrations. The assumption that the Ethiopian community could not organize a demonstration on their own is both mistaken and offensive.”

'External organizations' fingered

One of the thousands of Ethiopian Jews who took part in the protest on Sunday night told *Channel 2* of external organizations who were causing the violence and misrepresenting the Ethiopian community as it protested the [beating of Damas Pakada](#), an Ethiopian Jewish soldier who was brutally assaulted by a police officer in Holon last Sunday.

The protest - which also highlighted discrimination and police brutality towards the community in general - turned violent as 55 officers and 12 protesters were wounded, and 43 protesters were arrested.

"From the beginning of the protest it was quiet, the police showed restraint, we showed restraint. Ayalon (Highway) was blocked for three hours and nothing (i.e. no violence) happened there," said the protester.

"We came here, all sorts of organizations joined us," he said, at which point the interviewer asked him which organizations he meant. The man responded, "I don't want to list their names...I really expect them tomorrow morning to present their pangs of conscience over what they're doing, over what they did to an entire community."

"Everything that you see around here wasn't supposed to be," he said, indicating the violent unrest. "We said from the start, enough of the violence. Because that (non-violent protest - ed.) was really the goal. It started with unrest, and those who stirred it up - you won't see anyone from the (Ethiopian) community (among them)."

He continued: "it was those organizations that came and took as their goal to stir things up so that we would look like this," indicating a goal of creating a false impression that the Ethiopian community is violent.

New Israel Fund's fingerprints?

In another key piece of testimony, Deputy Tel Aviv District Commander Brig. Gen. Yoram Ohayon on Sunday night told *Yedioth Aharonoth* that external organizations are stirring up the violence, and even listed some of them by name.

"It's important to note there are other sources here who are not members of the (Ethiopian) community," he said, listing, "different sorts of anarchists, 'Lo Nechmadim,' 'Hamaabara,' who are taking part in the protest. They aren't just taking part in the protest, they're breaching the agreements with us."

The two groups he mentioned, Hamaabara and Lo Nechmadim are listed among the groups that comprise the Forum for Public Housing, which is coordinated by the organization Shatil, an arm of the NIF that advises, directs and coordinates NGO activities.