



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **San Diego - Sha'ar HaNegev Sister Cities Stand in Solidarity Amidst Profound Grief & Pursuit of Peace**

**San Diego CA**– [October 10, 2023] - San Diego Sister Cities' mission is deeply rooted in the steadfast pursuit of peace through people-to-people diplomacy and global community connections that foster mutual understanding and collaboration. Since our inception, our organization has been dedicated to bringing communities together to champion mutual understanding and foster peace. Currently, San Diego Sister Cities has 24 partnerships globally, and one of our valued partnerships is with Sha'ar HaNegev, where we work together to foster binational relations that serve the interests of both communities, address common challenges, and advance the pursuit of peace.

While we remain resolute in our commitment to a pathway to peace, our hearts are heavy with profound sorrow for the loss of dear friends and the distressing attacks on innocent citizens. Our deep concern is further exacerbated by the recent declaration of war. The Sha'ar HaNegev region is located on the Gaza border, encompasses ten kibbutzim, and is home to approximately 9,000 residents.

Earlier this year, we celebrated the official establishment of the San Diego - Sha'ar HaNegev Friendship Sister City, marking a new chapter in a relationship that has thrived in San Diego for over 25 years. This partnership has been nurtured and sustained with dedicated support from The Jewish Federation of San Diego County. Together, our communities have fostered transformative programs and lasting impacts, all founded on a shared commitment to cultural understanding and collaboration.

Today, we mourn the horrifying attacks on innocent citizens and grieve the loss of our esteemed colleague, Ofir Libstein, head of the Sha'ar HaNegev Regional Council. Our hearts ache for the lives lost, those taken hostage, and the wounded. Ofir Libstein valiantly sacrificed his life while defending his community.

Mayor Todd Gloria of San Diego extends his heartfelt condolences and expresses deep sadness at the loss of his friend. In his statement, Mayor Gloria said, "I learned of the death of Mayor Ofir Libstein; he led Sha'ar HaNegev in southern Israel and was killed defending his community. San Diego is a Sister City of Sha'ar HaNegev, and there are deep connections between our two cities. With the support of our Jewish community, our city has fostered strong ties with Israel. Our hearts are with the families of the innocent civilians killed in the attacks and all those in our own community suffering the agony of waiting for news of loved ones in danger."

Miri Ketayi, President of San Diego Sha'ar HaNegev Friendship City, added, "My heart is shattered by the unprecedented and inhumane situation in Sha'ar HaNegev. I am devastated over the loss of my dear friend, Mayor Ofir Libstein of Sha'ar HaNegev, who was tragically killed while defending his community against the brutal attack by Hamas. Mayor Libstein cared deeply about the relationship with San Diego and was elated



when Mayor Todd Gloria and San Diego International Sister Cities Association officially named Sha'ar HaNegev and San Diego as Friendship Cities.

Mayor Libstein often described Sha'ar HaNegev as a unique place where 95% is heaven and 5% is hell, referring to the times when Hamas launched rockets at Sha'ar HaNegev, forcing people to seek shelter in bunkers. He was a visionary for peace and had aspirations to build the infrastructure that would promote peace between Israel and its neighbors in Gaza. Sadly, on October 7, this dream was shattered.

I will forever cherish Mr. Libstein and many other friends in the Sha'ar HaNegev community, and I remain committed to their dream of peace and a strong connection with San Diego."

San Diego Sister Cities stands in solidarity with our friends in Sha'ar HaNegev. We are committed to this partnership and will continue to work diligently to exemplify the power of collaboration and solidarity between San Diego and Sha'ar HaNegev, making a significant impact in the pursuit of lasting peace.

**Additional Information about the San Diego - Sha'ar HaNegev Friendship City Partnership:**

In 2023, we officially established the San Diego - Sha'ar HaNegev Friendship Sister City, marking a new chapter in a relationship that has thrived in San Diego for over 25 years, thanks to the unwavering dedication of The Jewish Federation of San Diego County. The implementation of various educational initiatives, such as student exchanges and college internships, has significantly enhanced cultural understanding. The Sha'ar HaNegev Educational Village established by the Jewish Federation of San Diego County has been instrumental in delivering arts, music, design, and drama education to nearly 2,000 students. Additionally, the SouthUp Incubator has actively supported entrepreneurship and economic growth in the region. Despite the challenges posed by the Gaza border region, our commitment to developing programs that benefit all citizens in the area remains steadfast. This partnership stands as a testament to the strength of collaboration and shared values, offering hope and a clear path to peace.

San Diego Sister Cities, in collaboration with the Jewish Federation of San Diego, is seeking support in delivering urgent humanitarian aid to the residents of Sha'ar HaNegev. Please consider making a donation today to provide vital humanitarian assistance to innocent civilians affected by the ongoing conflict. Your support makes a difference. Learn More: [SanDiegoSisterCities.org](https://SanDiegoSisterCities.org) | Email: [Hq@SanDiegoSisterCities.org](mailto:Hq@SanDiegoSisterCities.org)