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Press release

New Report Reflects the Vital Role of Civil Society and Volunteers in the Early Phase of the Iron Swords War: Half of Israelis Volunteered in the First Two Weeks

[Jerusalem. Israel] – The Institute for the Study of Civil Society and Philanthropy in Israel at Hebrew University is pleased to release a comprehensive report on "Civil Society Engagement in Israel During the Iron Swords War: Emerging Trends and Preliminary Insights." This landmark report offers an in-depth analysis of the exceptional civil engagement and volunteerism witnessed in Israel during the initial two weeks of the October 2023 War.

The Iron Swords War was triggered by a heinous terrorist attack on Israeli civilians, launching a massive mobilization effort aimed at bolstering the nation. In response, civil society rallied under the banner of "Defending Our Home," setting aside pre-existing social divisions. The collaborative report, authored by experts at Hebrew University, examines the remarkable civil initiatives, volunteerism, and philanthropic contributions that played a pivotal role in addressing urgent needs and challenges during this critical period.

During the first two weeks of the war, civil initiatives demonstrated their remarkable ability to address the urgent needs and pressing challenges that arose within Israeli society. These initiatives played a pivotal role in executing crucial tasks such as rescue operations, evacuations, temporary shelter provision, and the distribution of vital food and medical supplies. Additionally, they provided invaluable psychological support to those affected, emphasizing the power of grassroots efforts in times of crisis.

Key Highlights:

Diverse Civil Initiatives: The report highlights over a thousand civil initiatives that emerged across Israel, encompassing a wide range of activities. These initiatives included the rescue and evacuation of civilians, animals, and provision of essential supplies, as well as support for bereaved families and those who went missing during the conflict.

Local and Affiliated Groups: Local and affiliated groups played a significant role in addressing the specific needs of their communities, providing temporary accommodation to evacuees and extending their support beyond their local borders.

Unprecedented Volunteerism: 48.6% of the Israeli population engaged in volunteering during the war, a notable increase from the rate observed during the Covid-19 crisis (33%). Notably, volunteerism cut across all age groups, genders, and religious affiliations. In particular, the rate of volunteerism among the Arab Israeli population during the war reached 29%, a notable rise from the 19% recorded during the Covid-19 crisis.

Spontaneous Volunteers: A substantial majority of volunteers (28%) during the war were newcomers to volunteering efforts, underscoring the widespread participation of citizens who had not volunteered before the conflict. These newcomers were predominantly secular and had above-average incomes.

Primary Volunteer Activities: The most prominent volunteer activities included collecting, packing, and distributing food and equipment, transportation of people, food, and equipment, assisting security forces, participating in outreach activities through social networks, and offering essential aid to evacuees.

Volunteers and Donations: Many volunteers integrated their efforts with financial contributions, participating in voluntary initiatives and crowdfunding campaigns, highlighting the synergy between volunteerism and philanthropy.

Inclusivity: Unlike the predominantly youth-driven volunteering seen during the Covid-19 crisis, individuals of all age groups participated actively. Notably, 46% of those aged 18-35, 52% of those aged 35-55, and 52% of those above 55 engaged in volunteering. Impressively, volunteerism transcended gender and religious boundaries. The use of technology for digital volunteering extended the reach to remote and mobility-limited populations, underscoring the adaptability and inclusivity of these volunteer efforts.

Remarkable Financial Mobilization: Israel witnessed a swift and substantial mobilization of financial resources, surpassing levels observed during prior military operations. Notably, support poured in from North American Jewry and Jewish federations, with donations estimated to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

The report underscores the importance of effective coordination between civil organizations and government bodies to ensure a unified response to pressing needs. It also suggests that civil organizations can evolve into a valuable support force for government activities during ongoing combat operations.

The Institute for the Study of Civil Society and Philanthropy in Israel at Hebrew University extends its gratitude to the numerous organizations and individuals who contributed to this assessment.

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem is Israel's premier academic and research institution. With over 25,000 students from 90 countries, it is a hub for advancing scientific knowledge and holds a significant role in Israel's civilian scientific research output, accounting for nearly 40% of it and has registered over 11,000 patents. The university's faculty and alumni have earned eight Nobel Prizes and a Fields Medal, underscoring their contributions to ground-breaking discoveries. In the global arena, the Hebrew University ranks 86th

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