**Chapter 6 | 2008-2021**

Conciliation talks \* A new chair \* An agreement with KKL \* Placing the Negev in the centre \* ‘Stop the JNF’ \* Efficiency measures \* The community reconfigures its philanthropy \* Closing peripheral offices and the Education Department \* Uncompromising support for Israel \* The Blue Box makes a comeback \* A tree on the roof \* Promoting Israel studies \* No free lunch \* A new vision for a new era, \* Not by donations alone \* What has the future in store?

Gail Seal and Samuel Hayek met in London in late November 2007. In January 2008, after several additional conversations, they announced the end of their organisations’ protracted dispute and a return to cooperation. Besides the official announcement, they concluded that Hayek would be appointed the chair of JNF UK and would receive all the powers that the president, Seal, had held, while Seal’s role will become ceremonial. They also agreed that several members of the Board of Directors would resign their posts and be replaced by new directors.

In the board of directors meeting on 18 February 2008, the old board elected replacements who, as Hayek loyalists, assured Hayek a majority on the board. On the same occasion, the JNF statutes were amended such as to transfer all of Seal’s powers to Hayek, who was elected unanimously as the chair of JNF UK. Thus, in a brilliant move, KKL brought a bitter, years-long, conflict with a smashing victory from its standpoint. All that remained was to write up a new agreement that would regulate the essence of relations between JNF UK and KKL. Until that was signed, KKL decided to temporarily continue with the company it had established in the UK.

Given Hayek’s notable success in negotiating with Seal, KKL asked him to intervene on its behalf in the American arena as well. Indeed, shortly after the announcement about the understandings that had been reached with JNF UK, a similar announcement was made about the restoration of cooperation between KKL and JNF in the United States.

The arrangement opened a new era between JNF UK and KKL in Jerusalem. Still, it was obvious to Hayek that the Fund’s battered image required rehabilitation. During his first few months in office, JNF’s activities continued in their ordinary way. As lawyers for JNF UK and of KKL and Jerusalem worked on the clauses of the written accord, delegations of young singles set out for tours of Israel (which also turned out to be rather successful potential matchmaking voyages for the participants). In May 2008, JNF UK and the UIA joined forces—their first collaboration in quite a while—to co-sponsor a gala banquet hosted by Prince Philip, husband of Queen Elizabeth II, at Windsor Palace on the occasion of Israel’s sixtieth anniversary.[[1]](#footnote-1) At the end of that month, the traditional rally from London to Jerusalem set out again and an art exhibition in London was presented, all proceeds going to Aleh Negev. Support for Aleh Negev would continue in subsequent years for the construction of a rehabilitation centre and classrooms, the purchase of equipment for the centre, and so on.[[2]](#footnote-2)

At the end of his first year in office, Hayek, a businessman and a collector of Israeli art who split his life between London and Tel Aviv, was listed among the hundred most influential persons in the community in a poll conducted by the *Jewish Chronicle* among its readers. Even though Hayek was known in Israel as a confidant and a trusted ally of senior personalities who were publicly identified with the Israeli Right,[[3]](#footnote-3) he was almost unknown in Britain. Within only a few months, however, he emerged from anonymity to the front ranks of leaders of the community’s influential organisations.

Although the agreements between Seal and Hayek required the former to wind up her duties at the end of that year, she announced her resignation in June. At roughly this time, JNF UK announced in a press release that Winters had been removed from his post as Executive Director of the Fund as a result of the findings of an internal investigation into his affairs.[[4]](#footnote-4) In response, Winters turned to the courts and filed three lawsuits—one against JNF UK for allegedly having breached his terms of employment, another against the Fund’s law firm, Mischon De Ray, on grounds of conflict of interest, and the third against the *Jewish Chronicle* for revealing the circumstances of the termination of his employment. After the suit against Mischon was dismissed and he had to cover the defendants’ court costs, Winters decided to withdraw his suit against JNF UK.[[5]](#footnote-5)

As soon as he took up his post, Hayek announced that JNF UK would continue to promote the Negev projects, expressed his aim to create fruitful cooperation with the community’s pro-Israel organisations, and promised to direct the Fund’s activity with full transparency. True to his word, Hayek reached out to the Charity Commission, asking it to reopen the investigation into past allegations of financial irregularities at the Fund. Concurrently, he ordered an independent investigation of the activity and assets of the Nes le-Eretz Israel association, which was still headed by Seal, in order to get to the bottom of its legal status: was it an independent Israeli nonprofit or an integral part of JNF UK? The answer remains pending at the present writing and is of great significance.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The understandings between JNF UK and KKL for continued cooperation were concluded in September 2008.[[7]](#footnote-7) In the draft agreement, it was established that JNF UK is an independent British-Jewish philanthropic organisation that would be allowed to use all configurations of the Jewish National Fund brand name for fifty years in return for a nonrecurrent payment of £10,000 (equal to NIS 60,000 at the time). It was also agreed that JNF UK would raise donations for and participate in various KKL projects, provided these meet the Fund’s criteria and be at the sole discretion of the members of its board. It was also made clear in the agreement that JNF would be fully free to support additional projects independently and separately from KKL.

Another clause in the agreement related to the matter of the fund that had been registered in Scotland by the joint decision of KKL and Stanley Levitt (who had already begun to produce star-studded events to raise funds for the construction of a reservoir in the Galilee). It was agreed that the organisation in Scotland should reunite with the British entity as a subsidiary. As for the rival company that KKL had set up in the UK during the standoff between the organisations, it was agreed that it would terminate its operations.

The sides decided to appoint an external consultant to help resolve the dispute about land. In his report, presented in October 2008, the consultant estimated that JNF UK was owed £5 million (NIS 30 million at the time) on account of KKL’s revenues from leasing fees for land that had been purchased with funds from the British charitable foundation. [the Charity Commission?] In the accord, signed on 12 November 2008, KKL undertook to remit this sum over a ten-year period and JNF UK, in turn, would invest the entire amount—at its sole discretion—in KKL social, educational, and ecological projects in the Negev and the Galilee, provided they meet the British criteria of charity.

The framework accord, signed at a solemn ceremony in the presence of members of the organisations’ boards of directors at the Mount Zion Hotel in Jerusalem, made no reference to the claim of title to land that had been acquired before the State of Israel was established because that matter entailed broader and deeper investigation. In the meantime, until the legal mess in this matter could be untangled, the sides undertook to keep it out of the courts and settle it between themselves.[[8]](#footnote-8) The question of who holds title to these lands remains murky to this day.

In the meantime, the lengthy exposure of the community to JNF UK’s battles set Hayek an especially challenging task, perhaps the most difficult that any chair or president preceding him had known: to set the crisis-battered organisation back on its feet, rehabilitate its public image, and restore the community’s trust in its goals and its modus operandi. If these challenges were not enough, Hayek also had to contend with a community whose philanthropy priorities had changed in a major way, donating much less to pro-Israel organisations and much more in support of associations and organisations that operated for and within the UK community. This tendency was conspicuously manifest in the financial statements for 2007. The receipts of JNF UK showed £16 million in revenue, but only around half of that sum was transferred to Israel. The other half was recorded in the books of JNF UK as income, but in practice the organisation served as merely a pipeline for distributing the community’s donations to other nonprofits through its subsidiary, JNF CA.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Yet another challenge that Hayek faced was to recapture the trust of the organisation’s big donors, consolidate his status among the leaders of the community’s large entities, and dispel media concern and suspicion toward this new man on the block, a task that proved to be quite complex. A key step that Hayek had to take to create trust in himself and rehabilitate the image of the organisation was the continued implementation of a policy of full transparency to the public. The strategy proved to be successful: by the end of 2008, in a survey carried out annually by Intelligent Giving, a firm that segments the activities of charitable funds, JNF UK already leaped upward in the index of openness and transparency, from scraping the bottom in the previous survey to a respectable slightly above average position.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Throughout this bumpy period, Hayek still had to maintain routine educational and social activity (foremost for children), continue to send delegations of adults and young people on getting-acquainting visits to Israel, and manage the Fund’s representative offices in Birmingham, Dublin, Glasgow, Halle, Leeds, Liverpool, and Manchester. These duties also went well and the first Green Sunday telethon in the Hayek era, held in February 2009 with dozens of volunteers, was devoted to the support of children in the Negev who were living under the threat of Hamas’ rockets. The Manchester branch earmarked the proceeds to the construction of a shelter in a playground in Sderot; in Scotland, the donations were pledged to tree-planting at the Gazit reservoir in Lower Galilee.

Just as the image rehabilitation efforts seemed to be heading in the right direction, JNF UK again found itself in an uncomfortable public position when it had to honour the previous administration’s undertakings. Seal, as mentioned above, had collaborated with Lauder and the Or NGO to build and develop new communities in the Negev and Galilee and made a commitment to long-term funding of the development of new settlements in the Negev. According to Or, funds that were promised to it had ceased to arrive since the new administration had taken office. Accordingly, it turned to the large donors of the project in the UK and asked them to bring pressure on JNF UK and threaten it with lawsuits. In response to the accusations, JNF UK disclosed the reasons for its decision to suspend the funding, arguing that Or had not been able to prove adequately that the funds sent to it by JNF UK to develop an entrance road to the Karmit and Shomriya settlements had reached their destination in full; instead, it claimed, the donations received from England had been put to other uses that were not part of the agreement that had been signed during Seal’s regime. The dispute with the donors (who represented Or in this affair) dragged on for several months and were about to be heard before a Beth Din (a rabbinical court) in Manchester and not in London, at Hayek’s insistence. Just then, the sides managed to straighten things out when Or promised to explicitly earmark the balance of the amount promised to it solely for their intended purposes and to certify this appropriately. Indeed, all balances of donations that were promised to Or were fully realised within several years.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The need to reorganise the Fund—first by making key appointments in the organisation and then by painstakingly subjecting its organisational activities around the UK to cost-benefit review—was clear to Hayek. In one of the first indications of a change in the Fund’s management policy, the traditional automobile rally and several cost-intensive fundraising events were cancelled. In lieu of these, Hayek wished to introduce a balanced, moderate, and focused policy that would appeal mainly to the young of the community, such as holding parties on Purim and Independence Day, discos, and speed-dating, as well as fundraising events for various projects, including planting a forest at Kibbutz Ruhama in the Negev as a demonstration of solidarity with the localities in Israel’s South, building a road to Halutsit (subsequently renamed Bene Netsarim), and building a boys’ dormitory at Halutsit 4 (subsequently Naveh).[[12]](#footnote-12) JNF UK also supported theevitalization of the Beersheva watercourse park, carried out a joint project with the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, and made up missing the funding for the development of the Gazit reservoir by means of the traditional pro-am golf tournament in Scotland. At the end of Hayek’s first year in office, JNF UK’s revenues exceeded £15.5 million. The community, despite the upheaval, appeared to still trust the organisation and support its goals.

In August 2009, the Government of Israel approved a reform at the Israel Lands Administration that would privatise urban land. Hayek was especially upset about the agreement that KKL and the state had worked out to swap urban land owned by KKL for state lands in the Negev and the Galilee. The reason for Hayek’s displeasure was that KKL and JNF UK had not yet concluded an agreement that would settle the discord over the rights and title to lands acquired using donations to the Charitable Fund [the Charity Commission?] in the UK in the pre-state era.[[13]](#footnote-13) Immediately after the agreement concerning the reforms was approved, Hayek set up an open public conference to which Tzipi Livni (chair of the Kadima party at the time) was invited as the keynote speaker, along with Chief Rabbi Sacks and Ron Prosor, then the Israeli ambassador to the UK. The purpose of the gathering was to discuss challenges that Israel faced in regard to housing in its main cities, along with its water crisis. Livni had to cancel her participation due to pressure from a massive pro-Palestinian campaign in Britain against senior Israeli defense officials, including a threat to seek arrest warrants against them on the ostensible grounds of war crimes. Only four years later, in May 2014, would Livni, by then the Minister of Justice, return to Britain—for another conference held by JNF UK.

The gathering took place despite Livni’s absence, under heavy guard as a protest rally was held outside the hall. Some of the demonstrators managed to infiltrate the hall and disrupt the event. This was only the opening shot in the organisation’s renewed struggle with the growing strength of anti-Zionist entities in the UK that inveighed against JNF UK in a well-publicised campaign titled ‘Stop the JNF’.[[14]](#footnote-14) It was apparently due to pressure from these entities that the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, removed his name from the list of the organisation’s honorary patrons. The UK’s two previous premiers, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, stood firm against pressure to do the same.

The year 2010 found JNF UK back in the courtroom. The organisation sued Morris (Charlie) Sherling, a former member of its board, who had promised Gail Seal that he would cover the onerous court costs in the dispute with KKL, which had ballooned to £1.5 million. Sherling, who had resigned from the JNF UK board in early 2009, had transferred only one-third of the sum that he had pledged and was therefore sued for the rest of it. Even though it meant more public exposure of the organisation’s dirty laundry, the sum was too large for JNF UK cover on its own. After negotiations, the two sides came to an undisclosed agreement.

Like many community nonprofits that were experiencing a major falloff in revenues, the Fund needed to take major belt-tightening steps. In view of the economic hardships that all pro-Israel organisations in the community shared, various ideas for expense-saving mergers were repeatedly broached, although none of them resulted in anything concrete.[[15]](#footnote-15)

As a result, despite the social activities that the peripheral branch offices of JNF UK (foremost those in Manchester and Leeds) organised, a painful decision about the offices’ continued operation had to be made. The activity and revenues of these offices ha contracted and it was necessary to implement efficiency measures. The decision was more urgent in the case of Manchester because at the beginning of that year, the UJIA announced the sale of Mamlock House, which all the Zionist organisations in Manchester had been using as their headquarters since 1962. In August 2010, JNF UK decided to close the offices in Manchester, Leeds, and Liverpool, and in November they informed that also the office in Birmingham would be closed. Instead of the branch offices, it was decided that a regional manager would be appointed to cover all of the northern UK.[[16]](#footnote-16) As JNF UK bid farewell to its branch offices, One Family UK announced that it was disaffiliating from JNF UK and striking out on its own.

London and Scotland continued their activity at full speed, under the slogan ‘Bringing Life to the Negev’. Scotland devoted the revenues from the golf tournament to the construction of a park at Merkaz Shapira, a national-religious community in the northern sector of the Shapir Regional Council area in the Negev; the traditional Walk for Water Mission set out on a hike in the Negev; and a delegation of seniors toured the country with a focus on the Negev. There was activity in areas besides the Negev; JNF UK also operated in Aminadav, a short distance from Jerusalem, where it planted a forest of 25,000 trees in appreciation of the Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks on the occasion of the bestowal of his peerage. Subsequently, Rabbi Sacks would describe the dedication of a forest in his name in Israel as the most heartwarming gesture he ever received.[[17]](#footnote-17)

In the year 2010 summary, JNF UK reported the appointment of Yonatan Galon, an Israeli, as the superintendent of planning and implementation of its projects in Israel. A program to connect projects with communities included cooperation with the New North London Synagogue. Such projects managed to hold revenues steady. In contrast to the steep decline in donation revenues that community organisations at large experienced, the JNF UK financial statements for the year showed £14.6 million in revenue (not including £5 million due to the accord with KKL), a major decline in expenses (to £1.4 million as against £2.2 million in 2008), and more generous earmarking of revenues to projects in Israel.[[18]](#footnote-18)

These auspicious results notwithstanding, there was no choice but to make further cutbacks in order to optimise financial efficiency. Accordingly, the building in Edgware was put up for sale and the decision was made to shut down the Education and Youth Department.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Amid the struggle against continued attacks by anti-Zionist organisations that sought to delist JNF UK as a charitable organisation, the Carmel disaster struck in December 2010. The worst forest fire in Israel’s history, it claimed forty-four lives and destroyed millions of trees across 2,500 hectares. JNF UK, like many of its counterparts in the Diaspora, mobilised at once for an emergency campaign to revitalise the Carmel forests. So did the commission in Scotland, gearing up quickly to produce a telethon. Additional Jewish organisations in the community mobilised as well, in a demonstration of solidarity with Israel.

Even as the community’s pro-Israel organisations cooperated at the surface level, subterranean tension built up between JNF UK and the Jewish Leadership Council, an entity established in 2003 to evolve the influence, coordination, cooperation, and pooling of resources of Jewish organisations in the community into long-term strategic planning. Hayek decided to relinquish his place on the Council (and has not returned to this day) due to what he called its exorbitant membership dues (£26,000 [per year?]) and a major increase in expenses relative to previous years. Beyond that, Hayek was unwilling to sit on the Council due to overt criticism by its executives (mainly the chair of the UJIA, Mick Davis) of Israel government policies and the intention of the heads of the Council to visit the West Bank. Hayek believed that Diaspora Jewish organisations, particularly Zionist ones, should not criticise Israel publicly because that would fuel the delegitimisation of Israel around the world and provide ammunition to its opponents’ hands. In response, the Council board claimed that Hayek was promoting politicisation at JNF UK and leading the organisation to isolation and secession from the community.[[20]](#footnote-20)

The tension between these organisations, which spilled into harshly critical articles in the community press and ignited a lively discourse on the topic, continued in subsequent years, each party trying to mobilise the other’s support. The principles that Hayek and the Council executives each presented represented two salient approaches that fomented tensions and disunity, which existed in any case among the British Jewish community leadership, on the question of the attitude toward Israel. The controversy was not limited to the UK; it recurred in many Jewish organisations throughout the Diaspora in regard to Israeli policy. One side took a mixed and critical approach toward Israeli government policy, chiefly in regard to the Palestinians; the other espoused Hayek’s conservative approach, which favored unreserved Diaspora support of Israel and opposed any form of political intervention in the country’s internal affairs. It may have been this manner of thinking within Hayek’s own organisation that inspired the spokesperson of JNF UK, Sam Westrop, to establish the British Israel Coalition, which proposed to amalgamate pro-Israeli organisations in the UK, including Christian and Muslim ones. The idea was to establish a leading position in public activism and demonstrate a pro-Israel media presence in the UK as a counterweight to the activities of the British BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) organisations. The forum proved its mettle by repelling hundreds of activists who demonstrated outside the Piller Hotel in Hendon when the Israeli Foreign Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, was invited to address the Coalition’s conference.

JNF UK, which had established itself as the community’s leading player in pro-Israel activity, focused most of its energy and resources (£2.3 million) on some twenty different projects in the Negev and the north, including support of the construction of reclaimed water reservoirs in Negba and Massuot Yitzhak; cooperation with the Ayalim association in establishing a students’ club in Yeroham in conjunction with the town’s municipal government; continued support of environmental landscape development at Neot Semadar (ongoing since 2008); assistance in establishing the Be’erot Yitzhak Heritage Site at the original location of this kibbutz, which had been destroyed in the War of Independence; construction of a children’s playground at Tel Sheva, the Habanim Park in Ofakim, and the Major Benji Hillman Lone Soldiers’ Home, named for an immigrant from the UK who had been killed in Lebanon in 2006; support of the social-education organisation HaShomer HaChadash; and many others. From an educational standpoint, JNF UK relaunched its program of social activities for young people as a way of promoting pro-Israel activism. The inaugural event of the program drew more than a thousand young people to a mass Purim party. Toward the year’s end, the organisation held a banquet to mark the 110th anniversary of the founding of the JNF, with the participation of 250 invitees and in the presence of the Israeli ambassador to the UK and with Member of Knesset Dr Nahman Shai invited as the main speaker.

Like many community nonprofits, JNF UK ended 2011 with a dramatic decline in revenues due to the economic recession that struck Britain. Press items about the organisation’s financial woes appeared prominently on the front page of the *Jewish Chronicle*. KKL Scotland, concerned that its name would be associated with the organisation in London, hurriedly responded by stressing that it was independent and totally separate from JNF UK. Even though it had been agreed that Scotland would relinquish the name KKL (Scotland) Charitable Trust and go back to operating under London’s authority (as mentioned in the November 2009 agreement with KKL), the board in Scotland maintained its independence, as it continues to do to this day.

In the year 2012, the nonprofits were revitalised by a dramatic financial recovery with a 76 percent (!) increase over the previous year, tracing to an upturn in legacy donations. As a result, twice the amount as the previous year was sent to nonprofits in Israel for funding social, ecological, educational, and community projects, mainly in the Negev. The projects included, to name only a few, a pre-induction course at Halutsit; an early childhood centre in Yeruham; Sapir College; Bet Ori; the Jerusalem botanical gardens; and the establishment of a technology and business hub in the town of Mitzpe Ramon to attract new residents and boost the economy.[[21]](#footnote-21) The choices of projects to support were backed by a holistic policy introduced by Hayek and broadly supported by the board of governors. [לא נתקלתי בכינוי זה עד עכשיו. האם מדובר במועצת המנהלים / ההנהלה? או משהו אחר?]. The practical manifestation of the policy was a decision to operate broadly, supporting multiple projects in different but complementary fields—education, healthcare, and employment—and thus impacting diverse population groups and bringing the periphery closer to the centre.

In the spring of 2013, the British registrar of nonprofits rejected the demand by the heads of the Stop the JNF campaign to delist JNF UK as a British charity. With this, amid an audible sigh of relief, support for Israel continued and the focus of attention turned back to the year’s three main initiatives—establishing a students’ village in Arad, continuing to support the HaShomer HaChadash organisation, and setting up a sports club and children’s enrichment centre in Kiryat Gat. In addition, that he summer the KKL CA subsidiary launched an online platform allowing donors to create personal accounts to which they could deposit their donations and allocate them to any registered nonprofit they saw fit. These projects aside, cooperation with the Or association continued for the development of a synagogue in Kefar Retamim, funding the construction of a rehabilitation centre in Sderot for the Ezra LaMarpeh organisation headed by Rabbi Avraham Firer; supporting a school in Bene Ayyish, and so on.[[22]](#footnote-22)

As head of the oldest Zionist organisation in Britain, Hayek considered it a high priority to create and promote cooperation with similar organisations. His goal was to bring the community closer to Israel, but now in a way that would be manifested not only in monetary donations but in identification with and unreserved support for the State of Israel. Repeatedly Hayek decried the silence of the leaders of community organisations amid the powerful awakening of antisemitism in the UK after Operation Protective Edge— a far-reaching military operation by the Israel Defense Forces in the Gaza Strip in the summer of 2014. Throughout this time, support for the inhabitants of Israel’s South continued along with educational and social activities in the community that were meant to make JNF UK’s presence conspicuous.

In one of these measures, the symbol most identified with JNF UK—the Blue Box—was reintroduced. The boxes now received a facelift and a smiling new mascot, Phil (as in ‘Phil the Blue Box’), replacing the long-forgotten Benjamin. Phil’s image was prominent in a mass picnic that drew more than 1,000 people to the traditional Green Sunday on Tu Bishvat (February 2015), all proceeds dedicated to the expansion of a centre for children with autism in Kiryat Gat. Tree-planting philanthropy enjoyed a rebirth a year afterward as the *Jewish Chronicle* came out with a special campaign, lasting more than a year, urging its readers to donate for a tree in the Lord Sacks Forest in Israel on the occasion of the 175th anniversary of the founding of the newspaper.

Relations between JNF UK and the UJAI—headed by Alan Aziz, a demonstrative supporter of Hayek’s, were revitalised. The two organisations co-produced an Israel advocacy and leadership program for members of the community aged 18–30. In Israel, the organisation supported the Derech Eretz young leadership program. The cooperation began in 2011 and continued in subsequent years including a leadership development program for young Bedouin in the Negev called Desert Stars. Assistance in education for the Bedouin was also manifested in the construction of computer labs at Al-Sayed School. These were only a few of the thirty projects that focused on empowerment and social empowerment of the residents of the Negev, some in collaboration with the Or Movement, including the construction of a community centre at Har Amasa and funding of furniture for a synagogue in Be’er Milka.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Winding up his term of service with the Federation in the summer of 2015, Aziz was named Executive Director of JNF UK and held the post for about a year and a half, after which Yonatan Galon succeeded him. During these years, the leadership of KKL Israel also changed and Daniel Attar became its new chair. Attar and Hayek agreed that the JNF UK would continue to support projects in the Negev (either via KKL or on its own) and act to strengthen relations between the community and Israel. In December of that year, the 4th Marquess of Reading, Simon Isaacs, great-grandson of the 1st Lord Melchett, was invited to accompany the JNF UK board of governors [??] on its annual visit to Israel to surveil the various projects, affirming the multiple years of support of the organisation’s activity that his family, in its various wings, had been providing.

Shortly before year’s end, the staff of JNF UK was surprised to find a beautiful tree growing on the roof of the building in Edgware. No one knew how and from where it had come. Despite its so-symbolic and appealing appearance, the tree, along with the building were abandoned with the move to new quarters at the Mountcliff House on Brent Street, Hendon.[[24]](#footnote-24) The focus on funding educational projects for children and youth in disadvantaged communities in southern Israel was maintained in the course of 2016, including the renovation of fifteen preschools in Kiryat Malachi, support of an Amit school, and the construction of sports grounds at Al-Sayed Comprehensive High School for Bedouin youth in the Negev. That summer, as a wave of fires in both open and built areas around Israel caused major harm (and was believed to be the product of nationalist arson), JNF UK responded by launching an emergency campaign to repair the damage. In most of its emergency campaigns for various events, it availed itself of approximately ninety volunteers in the community who contributed their free time to the organisation’s activities. In Israel, too, dozens of volunteers turned out to help get the projects going. One of the initiatives was a ‘day of volunteering’ in which Kibbutz Kerem Shalom, on the border of the Gaza Strip, received a visual facelift. In another day of this kind, the homes of people under the poverty line in Kiryat Malachi, Kiryat Gat, Arad, and Ashkelon were renovated. Such projects have become part of JNF UK’s ongoing work in Israel.

On the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of Israeli independence and the seventy-third anniversary of the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, JNF UK and KKL Israel joined forces to put on a concert featuring fragments of musical works that composer-prisoners produced during World War II while in the camps and the underground. The conductor and music scholar Francesco Lotoro had collected the fragments over decades and then combined into several works. The pieces were performed by students at schools of music in the Negev together with the Ashdod Symphony Orchestra at a ceremony in the Israel International Conference Centre in Jerusalem and broadcast live in London. The ceremony was also attended by delegations made up of heads and activists of KKL commissions all over the Diaspora, whose presence there symbolised the cooperation, coordination, and solidarity that now existed between the organisations.[[25]](#footnote-25)

JNF UK’s biggest challenge was to maintain its uniqueness and relevance and to compete for the generosity of an aging and shrinking community that donated to around eighty other entities (as of 2018) that did pro-Israel work in the community. Alongside the traditional donations, one of the new measures involved broadening the range of methods of donating and tailoring them to accessible technology that made donating easier. For example, JNF UK added its name to the list of nonprofits on ‘Amazon Smile’, which rewarded those who made purchases employing the interface with a contribution of half a percent of the value of the purchase.[[26]](#footnote-26) Another initiative was an attempt (ultimately aborted) to market a mobile application that prompted users to donate from time to time and allowed them to do so by simply pressing a button. Another project to enhance the visibility of JNF UK was the organisation of day outings in the Negev for JNF supporters who were visiting Israel privately, giving them an opportunity to witness the results of their donations up close.

On British soil, activities meant to deepen relations with the community included the inauguration of a special program of grants for the promotion of Israel studies and active inclusion of children in the community in JNF UK projects in Jewish schools. For this purpose, £1.5 million was budgeted for distribution to eighteen select primary and junior-high schools over a four-year period (2019–2022). In another part of the project, JNF UK conducted a ‘spoken Hebrew festival’ during which plays in Hebrew were performed in order to encourage the young to use the language. On Israel Independence Day in May 2020, under social-distancing restrictions occasioned by the Covid pandemic, JNF UK held an online contest of songs in Hebrew or associated with Israel. More than a hundred people entered the competition, which was refereed by Jewish celebrities from the community and watched online in roughly 5,000 households. During the first Covid lockdown, a campaign of aid packages for the indigent elderly in Israel was conducted and Israeli celebrities were hosted at fundraising evenings for various projects, such as those of Simha Layeled, an association that helps children with disabilities and patients with chronic illnesses, and of Yad Tamar, which assists cancer patients and their families. These, too, served to bring the community closer to Israel.

\*\*\* Epilogue \*\*\*

Over the years, despite immense efforts to sustain social and cultural activity in the community, the share of direct donations that JNF UK obtains in traditional ways has been steadily declining. Today, the organisation derives most of its revenues from the activities of the two subsidiaries—KKL ET and KKL CA. The former as the main source of support (at some £80 million per year). Thus, in May 2020, after a query had been presented to the British registrar of nonprofits, a fundraising regulator was appointed due to concern that KKL ET’s free consulting service for its customers, meant for earmarking some of their estates to projects in Israel, might be an ethical violaton. Accordingly, an arrangement that provided testators with external legal advice was worked out. The decision to do this was crucially important not only for JNF UK but also for all pro-Israel Jewish organisations in the community that mimicked the model of legacy recording and estate management that JNF UK had created.[[27]](#footnote-27)

It was clear to everyone that legacy funds reserved for Israel would decrease meaningfully in the coming decades and accordingly much of the organisation’s revenue would be lost. Given the challenges of the time and the changes in the community’s philanthropy patterns due to the steady erosion of the allure of the Zionist enterprise in the community as Israel lost some of its romantic charm, alternatives had to be created that would assure stable future revenues by which JNF UK could continue to pursue its calling.

Accordingly, since 2019, while supporting social and educational projects and as part of its effort to make impact investments, JNF UK began to acquire real-estate properties in peripheral and other areas of Israel. It leases these properties at a discount to recent immigrants and to organisations that engage in developing the periphery. The first dwellings acquired in this manner in Yeroham were used as provisional (five-year) housing for young entrepreneurs in technology and high-tech, in the hope that they will settle in the Negev permanently, develop the region, and raise their families there.[[28]](#footnote-28)

In an interview with *The Jerusalem Post* on 2 December 2021, Hayek expressed trepidation for the future of UK Jewry (‘Jews do not have a future in England’) in view of the escalation of antisemitism and demographic changes in British society—in reference to Muslim immigrants and their influence on the British government.[[29]](#footnote-29) The interview inspired powerful emotion reactions among British Jewry in Israel and the UK. The Board of Deputies, the representative body of Jewish organisations and large synagogues in Britain, furiously condemned Hayek’s remarks, signed a petition demanding his resignation, and urged other community organisations to stop cooperating with him and isolate JNF UK unless he resigned. Hayek held on, stating that he had aimed his remarks not at the population of Muslim immigrants at large but only at groups among them that were spreading hate against the community. He had expressed this view as a private individual, he added, and advised that it should not be considered representative of the stance of JNF UK or of its board members.[[30]](#footnote-30)

This concern for the future of British Jewry has not surfaced in a vacuum. Antisemitism has remerged in recent years; 2021 saw a record number of antisemitic events in the UK and all levels of the Jewish community sense it and are fearful of it. It is not for nothing that JNF UK continues to see its mission as serving as a binding link between British Jewry and Israel. It is an organisation that seeks to support Israel’s defense and its social, ecological, environmental, educational, and cultural resilience—unreservedly and as a true partner in the establishment and maintenance of the State of Israel. Throughout the organisation’s lengthy history, at times of prosperity and recession, peace and emergency, one vision has persisted constantly among all of its leaders throughout the years: Jewish pride and the reinforcement of the Jewish National Home.

The motives of this vision stem from the conscience that is engraved in the DNA of the Jewish of mutual responsibility, alongside the fear of the return of those benighted days in Jewish history. For more than 120 years, JNF UK has never lost sight of its singular goal. The hundreds of millions of pounds sterling that the community has donated to the growth and prosperity of the Jewish National Home—reclaiming title to land, planting forests, building reservoirs, developing and preparing land for dozens of localities in the periphery, and helping recent immigrants and disadvantaged population groups—demonstrate that UK Jewry considers itself a partner in the eternal vision—linking the community with the Jewish People, the Land of Israel, and the State of Israel **in an unbreakable bond.**

1. Due to a sudden illness, the banquet was actually hosted by his son, Prince Andrew. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. JNF UK Archive, G87/2, funding contract, 15 December 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Interview with Samuel Hayek, *Ha’aretz,* 27 February 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Jewish Chronicle, 4 July 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Jewish Chronicle,* 17 October 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. JNF UK Archive, G114, summary of administration meeting, 8 December 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Jewish Chronicle,* 12 September 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. JNF UK Archive, agreement signed on 12 November 2008; see also *Economist* site*—*’A Historic Agreement’ [Hebrew] [הוספתי זאת] <http://www.economist.co.il/?CategoryID=1533&ArticleID=5962&Page=23> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Jewish Chronicle,* 14 November 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Jewish Chronicle,* 5 December 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Jewish Chronicle,* 27 February 2009; JNF UK Archive, G114, summary of board meeting, 8 December 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. JNF UK, G13/5, contract from May 2009, and also Halutsit file, G38/2. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Jewish Chronicle,* 24 July, 2009. Hayek interview with this newspaper against the background of Knesset discussions of the impending reform. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Jewish Chronicle, 11 June 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Jewish Chronicle, 23 July 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Jewish Chronicle,* 13 August 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. JNF UK Archive, G38/5, Projects File. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Jewish Chronicle,* 13 August 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Jewish Chronicle,* 21 January 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Jewish Chronicle, 4 March 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. JNF [JNF UK?] Archive, G65, financial statements for 2012 (copy in the author's possession), [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. JNF [JNF UK?] Archive, G38/3, Projects with Or Movement file. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. JNF UK Archive, G38/3, Projects with Or Movement file. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Mountcliff House, 154 Brent Street, London NW4 2BF. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Notes of Hope: preserving works lost in the Holocaust, <https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-5227481,00.html>, retrieved on 25 June 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. smile.amazon.co.uk [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Jewish Chronicle, 1 May 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *The Marker,* 14 August 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. *The Jerusalem Post,* 2 December 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Jewish News, 23.1.2022 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)